

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/2367782) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/2367782>.

Rating:	Mature
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Free!
Relationships:	Nanase Haruka/Tachibana Makoto , Nanase Haruka & Tachibana Makoto , makoharu
Characters:	Nanase Haruka , Tachibana Makoto , Hazuki Nagisa , Ryuugazaki Rei
Additional Tags:	Tokyo (City) , Fluff , Friends to Lovers , First Love , Future Fic , Slice of Life , Sexual Tension , Fluff and Smut , Angst Free , Mild Sexual Content , First Time , Body Worship , Romance
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2014-09-27 Completed: 2014-11-02 Words: 48,599 Chapters: 12/12

2 / 13189000

by [tide \(tothemoon\)](#)

Summary

Even with all of Tokyo's new acquaintances, classmates, near-strangers, and neighbors, Haruka and Makoto will choose each other.

a world alone

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

one

Sometimes Haruka will walk in the rain without an umbrella, just because of how different the water feels on his skin. It's something he's done before in Iwatobi, always along the edge of the curb with the sea beside him, but after a block of doing the same here in Tokyo, bumping shoulders and hearing all the noise of car horns and inane street chatter, he realizes it's just not the same here in the city. Haruka stops in the middle of the crosswalk, where everyone shuffles out of the way, around him. Haruka realizes he's not even sure where he's going.

Haruka looks over his shoulder, expecting Makoto to scold him to get under his umbrella like he usually does in Iwatobi, but now he's just greeted by a sea of people he doesn't recognize. With one more glance behind him, still finding nothing and no one of interest, he decides to cross the road before he really disrupts traffic.

"Haru!"

Looking up, Haruka finds Makoto waiting at the other side of the street. He's staring right at Haruka, holding a large umbrella that's big enough for the two of them.

Haruka just walks a little faster, reaching his best friend in a matter of moments.

"Walking in the rain again?" Makoto asks, with a sigh. "You're gonna get sick."

Haruka shrugs. "I wanted to feel the water."

"You have a pool for that." Makoto laughs. "You always have the water."

"But this is—"

"It's *different*. I know." Makoto finishes for him with a small laugh. "I know."

They walk on together, down this unfamiliar city block, but Haruka doesn't really care where they end up going. He didn't even really *have* plans to see Makoto today, in fact they haven't seen each other all week because of swim meets and tests, so he just takes in his company like a small, unspoken blessing.

It's a dreary day, grey all around and wet in a murky, uncomfortable way, but with Makoto it feels like there's sun on his face.

"How did you find me?" Haruka asks him quietly. He's not even sure Makoto can even hear his question through all this noise. But Makoto hears him all the same, because he can *always* hear Haruka, and he just shrugs.

"I don't know, to be honest." Makoto says. "I *was* actually going to call you later tonight to see if you wanted to have dinner with me, but then I saw you across the street. Stroke of luck, huh?"

"Hm." Haruka says.

Of all the approximately 13,189,000 people in the greater metropolitan area, of course he had to find Makoto in this particular neighborhood and on this random street block. Haruka is not one to believe in things like *luck*, but he thinks about the number, how astronomically high it really is, and just shuffles a little closer to Makoto under the umbrella.

Of all the 13,189,000 people here in this faceless city, he's the only one who gets to walk side by side with Makoto.

five

Haruka sneezes into his handkerchief and lets out a sound from his throat resembling a dying ostrich on the dry savannah. He falls back into bed, looking longingly over at his duffel bag and the new swimming jammers he has laying on top, a brand new suit he's convinced has the *perfect* fit. But of course, as luck would have it, he's much too sick to actually leave his apartment to do any sort of swimming.

"Hey, Haru, come take your medicine."

And of course, Makoto is here to take care of him.

Haruka buries his face into his pillow and shakes his head. He hates swallowing pills.

"This is what you get for walking in the rain yesterday." Makoto sighs. "Told you." He just shows a cheeky little smile and sits right down next to Haruka's bed in the floor, near where he's laying his head.

"Shut up." Haruka says, groaning and half alive.

"Nothing we can do about it, huh?" Makoto laughs a little. "Here, come a little closer." Haruka complies, with the little strength he has.

Makoto presses his hand gently to Haruka's forehead, sifting Haruka's hair out of the way as he feels his temperature. Closing his eyes, Haruka just lets him without any complaint. Heat rises to his face suddenly, and he can feel a heavy sigh leave his system but he tells himself it's because he's sick.

"Ah, you definitely have a fever." Makoto says. "I'll go get you a wet towel." And that's what he does, leaving Haruka by himself in the room for the moment.

Now that Haruka thinks about it, Makoto should be at his university right now. Haruka's assumptions are proven correct when the alarm clock on his nightstand beeps. It's four in the afternoon on a Tuesday. Makoto's usually in the library at this time, with the friends he's

made in lecture, probably complaining about the professor talking too fast or copying the extra class notes he missed in class.

Haruka remembers Makoto telling him there are five of them, three girls and two other guys, all of them tolerable and personable enough to be considered acquaintances. And Haruka's heard a little about all of them. The two boys in the group are former competitive swimmers like Makoto, from the same high school back in Kyoto. Amongst the girls, one of them plays guitar in an underground band, and Haruka remembers something about someone else doing tea ceremony. *Or was it flower-arranging?* Maybe it's both. Haruka doesn't try to think about them too hard and decides that he's just too sick to care.

All Haruka knows, in his fever-induced haze, is that Makoto, *predictably*, will have no problem making friends in Tokyo. Five friends could turn into *twenty*, if he really wants that. Makoto is too genuinely warm for people not to gravitate towards him after all, with a kindness that feels like a subtle touch against a fevered forehead. Haruka imagines a gaggle of people hovering around him, all of them holding books under their arms and toting giant backpacks, making inside jokes the swimmer won't understand.

He tells himself that this doesn't bother him, when in all actuality, it does.

Makoto returns to Haruka with a folded towel. He sits back down next to him places it over Haruka's head. The sudden coldness makes Haruka flinch a little.

"Sorry." Makoto says. "Is it too cold?"

Haruka shakes his head carefully so the towel doesn't fall off. "It's fine," he says.

"Something wrong?" Makoto asks. "I mean, besides being sick." Of course he can sense something's off. Haruka's *usual* defenses aren't able to get by Makoto on any other regular day so he imagines he's comically easy to read right now.

"No." Haruka lies anyway.

"Oh, come on. It's written all over your face." Makoto refutes.

Haruka looks over at the clock. He's too tired to fight off whatever inclinations he has to say '*it's nothing*' or '*never mind*.'

"You should be at school right now." Haruka finally says, dizzier than ever. He coughs a little bit and snuffles.

Makoto just looks confused for a moment, and then he laughs a little. "Are you turning into my mother?" he asks jokingly, pressing his hand against the towel on Haruka's forehead.

"It's just... *friends* and all." Haruka says, a bit shyly. "And getting notes," he adds, just to add an extra layer of defense, a thin glass wall that Makoto sees through without any problems.

"Notes?" Makoto asks.

"Notes." Haruka nods.

“Oh, it’s okay.” Makoto says, his eyes lowering. He looks almost tender about it, but Haruka can’t tell if it’s just his clouded mind playing tricks on him. “I can’t just leave you alone, can I? What kind of person would I be if I did that?” he asks a little quieter. He still has his hand on Haruka’s forehead, like he’s forgotten he’s placed it there.

Haruka blushes a little. “I can take care of myself.” He says.

“Look at you, though.” Makoto responds. “When you’re talking about willingly *being in school*, that’s when I know you’re not well. I *want* to be here, with you.”

With you.

Makoto takes his hand off Haruka’s forehead slowly, but Haruka just takes a hold of his fingers and grasps onto them lightly. He wouldn’t be doing this so blatantly if he was in his right mind. Makoto just holds his hand back, silently, but comfortably, and leans his head on the side of Haruka’s bed. Suddenly, a memory without a real image comes back, like a whispering ghost: *it’s meaningless without you*, it’s saying.

“Let’s get you better.” Makoto whispers. “Don’t worry about anything else.” Haruka doesn’t say anything to that, because he’s too busy thinking about something else.

Makoto has chosen to sit here, with Haruka, when he could be out with friends in an expansive city with a whole universe of opportunity. Makoto isn’t with either of those other swimmers from Kyoto, or the guitar player in the underground band, or the girl who may or may not be into flower arranging. He’s not in the library, or at a café getting coffee with new friends and acquaintances. Instead, Makoto’s here, in a musty little apartment fetching cold medicine and wet towels. Makoto has chosen to be with Haruka.

Haruka blushes again, he can feel it really light up his face this time, but there’s not much he can do about it. With a tired sigh, he lets go of Makoto’s hand slowly, covering his face up with the covers. He asks Makoto for ginger tea, for his throat, but this is more to get him out of the room than anything else. It’s too embarrassing, to let Makoto see him like this.

“I’ll be right back then.” Makoto says with a nod, as he leaves the room again. Haruka emerges from under his covers once he knows he’s gone. He can still feel the warmth on his hand, right in the center of his palm like a galaxy’s star. He presses it to his cheek, expecting any kind of relief, but it never comes. His face still feels hot.

And with that, Haruka is beginning to suspect that his fever isn’t just from some random walk in the rain.

three

It’s not like Haruka hasn’t made new friends. Well, they’re more like *barely-there acquaintances*, but they’re all decent enough people. Sometimes, when he doesn’t feel like eating on a park bench alone after morning practice, or if he doesn’t have plans to meet Makoto, he’ll join three other teammates for lunch. He usually stays quiet most of the time,

only opening his mouth to give one-word answers if he's asked something, but no one seems to mind. Training can be lonely, and Haruka imagines that quiet company is better than none at all.

Today, he's running with those same three teammates at a park near the swim club. Haruka isn't the biggest fan of running—and he's still a little sick, anyway, so overexerting himself doesn't seem like the smartest plan—so he's content with keeping pace behind all the others. Suddenly one of them turns his head and offers a polite smile to Haruka.

“Hey, Nanase!” he calls, out of breath, “did you do any running when you swam in high school?”

Haruka nods. “A little.”

Another one of the boys looks over his shoulder. “Conditioning is the *worst*.”

“It really is!” The third one says. “But my girlfriend’s *always* making me go with her. She says, *Yuta! If you want to make it to the Olympics, you have to run with me every day!* I think she just wants me to spend more time with her.” Haruka’s noticed he’s the most talkative of the group.

“Mine’s always too busy studying to run with me.” The first one sighs. “Med school, and all.”

“At least you guys *have* girlfriends.”

Yuta, the talkative teammate, looks over at Haruka. “What about you, Nanase? You got anyone?”

This is the sort of chatter Haruka avoids, but it was bound to come sooner or later. He’s about to shake his head and tell them *no*, but he can’t bring himself to say it. Suddenly, Haruka thinks of Makoto. He squeezes the hand Makoto held into a small fist, wondering why *he’s even thinking about him*, and he knows the other guys are still waiting for an answer.

Ultimately, Haruka does say “no, I don’t,” but the answer doesn’t sit right with him.

“Ah, one day!” one of them says. “If that’s what you want, that is.”

Haruka stops, catching his breath and still coughing up whatever’s left of his cold, suddenly feeling sick again. It’s like someone’s stomped on his chest and he’s a lot more lightheaded than he thought would be. He motions for the others to keep going, and his *barely-there* acquaintances just shrug and run up the path without him, as expected. He tries picturing them running with whomever their significant others are, *side by side*, but he can only recall the times he’s gone on jogs with Makoto in Iwatobi.

As Haruka catches his breath, the others running from his line of vision and out of his sight, there's only one thing he's thinking.

‘I’d like to run with Makoto.’

five-hundred and seventy-three

Of the five-hundred and seventy-three people sitting in the stands for this college swim meet, none of them are Makoto. In the facility, there are eighteen scouts, five coaches, probably about two hundred or so students, twenty-eight total swimmers on Haruka's team, and maybe thirty on the other, and the rest are identifiable guests and vendors. But the fact remains that, despite Makoto saying, *"yes, I'll be there, row three, seat five,"* his usual seat right by the starting block, he is no where to be seen. Haruka scans the crowd of blurred faces once more before giving up and putting his goggles on.

His first race, a 100-meter heat in freestyle, turns out well enough. He places second overall, setting a personal best. As Haruka pulls himself out of the water, he glances again towards row three, seat five. Now there's an old man sitting there, half asleep. Still not Makoto.

His next race, a 200-meter heat this time, doesn't go as well. He places fifth overall. As he's getting out of the pool, he hears his coach yell at him about pacing himself much better next time, but Haruka's not really listening. Again, he looks to row three, seat five, and finds, once again, that the seat is devoid of anyone named Tachibana Makoto.

It shouldn't bother him this much, but it does. He tells himself that it's not like Makoto comes to all of his races *anyway*, but the fact is that he never misses the ones he says he'll attend. As the rest of Haruka's swim team leaves for the day, separating into their groups to get food or hit the gym, Haruka goes up to the stands and looks for Makoto's usual seat.

Just as he sits down in seat five, row three, Haruka feels his phone vibrate in his pocket. The caller ID reads *Makoto*.

"Makoto." Haruka answers.

"Ah! Haru, is the meet over?" He sounds like he's outside somewhere crowded. *"Oh, excuse me, sorry."* He's probably just accidentally bumped into someone in the street, and now he's apologizing profusely.

"Yes." he answers.

"I'm sorry!" Makoto says. *"I got caught up studying at the library. You wouldn't believe this, but I fell asleep right on my book...how embarrassing. Drool was involved."*

Haruka can't help but crack a smile at that, and he's glad the pool is mostly empty, save for a few custodians. He's glad Makoto can't see it.

"That's okay," Haruka says as plainly as possible. "Are you still coming over here?"

Makoto doesn't answer for a moment, probably because he's still trying to maneuver through the street. It must be insanely crowded by this time, and he feels bad that Makoto's going through this sort of trouble to come to Haruka for a meet he's already *missed*.

"Yeah! I'm actually almost here. I was worried that you left already."

"No." Haruka says. "I'm in your seat."

Haruka can hear Makoto's laugh even through all the noise in the background. *"Row three, seat five."* He muses.

"Yeah." Haruka says, but he's only met with silence over the line.

"I really do feel bad for missing your race, Haru." Makoto admits.

This makes Haruka's face go red, and this is something he can no longer blame a fever on. He just stares down at his sneakers, not really sure what to say.

"Don't," Haruka says simply.

"You're not mad?"

"Not mad."

Makoto sighs over the end. *"Ah, okay. Well I'm on your campus now. Do you want to get dinner?"*

There's nothing Haruka wants more. "Okay."

"What do you want to eat?"

Haruka thinks about it. "Anything you want."

"What? No mackerel today?" Makoto laughs. And with that, one of the doors nearest to Haruka opens and Makoto himself comes through, still wearing his black framed glasses. His hair looks like a mess under his beanie and his backpack is half-open. Still, he looks relieved to see Haruka. The other boy just hangs up his phone and stays in his seat as Makoto takes the one next to him.

"So you mean it, then? *Anything?*" Makoto asks.

"Don't make me take my offer back." Haruka taunts.

"Haru!"

The two of them stay there for another hour, leaning against the metal guard railing and staring out at the water in the darkness. Makoto mostly talks about his day at school, a bunch of mundane things Haruka could listen to ten thousand times over, and again, it seems they're in their own world, alone.

"Wanna go eat now?" Haruka asks after a little while.

"In a bit." Makoto answers. "I'm good where I am right now." He smiles that usual *Makoto* smile, and Haruka just feels like collapsing back in his seat from the sight of it, but he stays standing with wobbly knees and a dizziness that only reemerges every time Makoto's around.

And before either of them realize it, they're touching shoulders, so close that Haruka's tempted to lean his head towards him and rest there for a moment.

Chapter End Notes

EVERYTHING IS GOLDEN BECAUSE TOKYO MAKOHARU IS SO REAL

Sorry I had to get that out of my system. I'm still riding on the MakoHaru high. Anyhoo, this will probably be a short work. I just wanted to play with numbers for this one. I listened to "Latch (Acoustic Version)" by Sam Smith a lot for this. I would usually listen to Dearly Beloved but this fic wasn't as....somber as the other one.

There might be mistakes and all but I'll go back to fix it later because I just finished taking my LSAT and I'm beyond tired. Toodaloo!

tongue twisters

Chapter Summary

In which Haruka feels the words form, but he'll never say them.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

twelve

Haruka knows he can't steal all of Makoto's time.

It's been about a month since Makoto started volunteering at a community swim club, once a week for four hours in the evening, for a novice swimmer's class for kids aged five through eight. This means that Haruka usually spends Friday evenings, from five p.m. to ten p.m., counting train travel time, alone, and that's only if Makoto even has enough energy at all to drag himself to Haruka's apartment at all after he's done working. Sometimes, actually more often than not on these particular Friday evenings, Makoto goes back to his own place with nothing but a small slew of text messages or a drowsy phone call to end the night.

It's four thirty-five on one of those Friday evenings, and Haruka's about ready to settle into an evening of half-heartedly attempting homework, soaking in the tub, and watching a bunch of old Olympic footage his coach keeps scolding him to study. He already has one foot in a bath he thinks is absolutely perfect in terms of temperature and water level, actually he actually almost *sighs* thinking about it, before he hears his cell phone ring from underneath the pile of clothes he's left on the floor. He doesn't even have to look at caller ID to know who it is.

"Makoto," Haruka answers as he sits down in the bathtub, bringing his knees to his chest and releasing a noiseless sigh.

"Sorry, this isn't that person." It's an unfamiliar voice. Haruka frowns and checks the caller ID. It clearly says *Makoto*.

"Who is this?" Haruka asks.

"Oh, uh, well, Makoto dropped her phone on the train and this was the first name on the favorites list."

"His." Haruka corrects him. "So you have his phone, then?"

"Yes, and I was wondering if you could give me a way to give it back to him? Like an address?"

Haruka stands up in the bath tub and climbs out, placing his phone on the sink, pressing for the speakerphone. "I'm not giving away any addresses." Makoto's already scared enough of horror movies, so sending a potential serial killer right to his front door is out the question.

He pulls off his swim jammers, dries himself off with a towel, and puts his clothes back on. "Meet me at a train station and I'll get it myself."

After arranging a time and place, retrieving Makoto's phone from what appeared to be a frazzled salaryman in his forties, Haruka decides to go to the swim club where Makoto volunteers. It's almost six-thirty by the time he makes it there, still another two and a half hours to go until Makoto gets off work, so he settles for waiting in the stands, setting textbooks on his lap to do reading for class. He knows deep down he won't get any reading done, though.

Haruka spots Makoto almost instantly: he's standing by the edge of the pool in the old green-stripe jammers he wore in high school with a white staff t-shirt, talking to a bunch of little kids standing against the wall. Haruka counts twelve of them. Some of them look scared, some of them antsy to just jump in the pool already, and Makoto seems equipped to handle either sort. Haruka watches as Makoto kneels down to eye level to attend to a girl who just looks absolutely *terrified*, and he imagines his words will soothe her in no time.

He tries reading Makoto's lips, but he doesn't have to think too hard about what he'd say. *It's okay* would be one of his reassurances. He'd definitely tell them, *I've got you*, and *don't be scared*. Haruka closes his eyes for a moment, taking in the smell of chlorine while he lets Makoto's hypothetical words dance around his head like a quiet instrumental.

I'm here. That's something else Makoto would say, Haruka thinks, before he realizes that he's the one mouthing the words. He opens his eyes, neglected books slipping right off his lap, wondering if Makoto can see him from the stands. He *wants* Makoto to know he's here, a twinge of embarrassment prickling the backs of his ears from how much he cares about this. He knows he can't monopolize all of Makoto's time, that they can't always sit on park benches together or share umbrellas during storms, but he can't help but want to be around Makoto anyway. He'll take all these small seconds, especially in a city that just never seems to stop.

Haruka finds Makoto again, yanking off his shirt and about to jump into the pool. Makoto glances up at the stands and finds Haruka, a little surprised that he's come all the way here, but he just smiles at his best friend and gives a wave. After, he points out Haruka out to all of his students. They all wave excitedly like little kids do, and Haruka can only reciprocate in reluctant motions.

'I'm here.' Haruka doesn't have to say anything. Makoto only glances over at him from over his shoulder, his softened gaze lingering just a little too long. He mouths something that Haruka can make out this time.

I'll be with you soon.

twenty two

Haruka walks up the stairs with Makoto as he's examining the dented edges of his dropped cell phone, the one that Haruka came to deliver to him. They're at the fourth floor of his dorm building, where twenty-two other students reside, but the hallway is currently quiet minus the sound of jazzy piano music and low laughter.

"I really have to thank you again, Haru." Makoto sighs. "I know we didn't have to use our phones that much in Iwatobi, but here I'd be dead without it."

Haruka thinks about all the people that could be calling Makoto here in Tokyo. His parents, his twin siblings, Rei, Nagisa, maybe Rin if the part-time Australian ever had the time--those people were a given. But what about the others? He thinks about his new friends: the two swimmers from Kyoto, the guitar player in the underground band, the girl who does flower arrangements, whoever else he's met...how often do they call Makoto? What kind of emoticons do they use with him? Do they even text him? Haruka ponders about all of this as Makoto opens the door to his dorm, before realizing he's just being silly at this point. Why does it matter, how other people call him?

He's successful in putting the questions out of his head until Makoto's phone jingles in his hand. He looks at the screen, tapping away shortly before putting his phone into his pocket. Makoto just stays there, staring at the door opposite his dorm, eyes narrowing in slight annoyance.

"Wait for it," Makoto says to Haruka with a bemused smile. Soon after that, a rowdy holler emerges from behind the closed door.

"Oh come on, Tachibana! Let's go eat ramen! Stop rejecting us!" No doubt it's the person who sent that text a moment ago.

"Not tonight!" Makoto yells back, before looking over at Haruka. "I've got company."

Haruka just looks back at Makoto, who's just shaking his head in exasperation at the door. Makoto catches Haruka looking and offers another smile, but Haruka's too embarrassed to look him in the face. They go inside, to his room, where he offers Haruka some tea from the commissary or some fish flavored crackers he's got in one of his drawers.

"Ramen?" Haruka suddenly asks him.

"Ah, a couple of the guys on the floor are new to the city, too. They're on a quest to find the *perfect* ramen and they're always looking for more critics. They have a rating system and everything."

"You should go." Haruka says, although he doesn't really mean it.

"I mean, I *am* hungry, but it's all right." Makoto laughs a little and opens up a packet of the crackers, taking a handful, but he never actually eats anything.

"Ah." Haruka says.

"I never do get to see on Fridays, actually." Makoto muses.

Makoto's phone goes off again, but he ignores it this time. Quietly, he offers Haruka the crackers he has, to which Haruka takes him up on his offer.

"Is it mackerel flavored?" Haruka says.

Makoto, already exhausted from a night of teaching and traveling, just flops back on his bed and laughs a little. "Of course you'd ask that," he says in a small voice. This is something Haruka's said every other day of the week, a predictable set of words from a someone who usually says very little else, but Makoto doesn't seem to mind in the slightest. He's just laying there, his laughter trailing off into a sigh, and then nothing shortly after that.

Haruka sits next to Makoto on the bed and realizes Makoto has fallen asleep. So much for a Friday visit, but Haruka knows it can't be helped. He sneaks in a small smile and finds a blanket for Makoto, before leaving out the door. He has errands to run tomorrow anyway, and an unlikely interview with the local newspaper, so he shouldn't be out that late. With one more look from the doorway, Haruka whispers a small '*good night.*'

The heat in his face only grows every time he's around Makoto, and at this point it feels like a radiator behind his cheeks. He touches one of them gently, feeling that familiar warmth as he makes his way back down the hallway. There's no use trying to fight it anymore.

Maybe that's one of the perks of being alone. Makoto shouldn't have to see the strange phenomenon that is Nanase Haruka blushing profusely.

ten thousand, seven hundred and ten

"Just to let you know, Nanase-san, about ten thousand people read the local newspaper."

"Well, it's precisely, um," the other reporter looks down at a clipboard. "Ten thousand, seven hundred and ten. If you wanted exact figures." She pushes the frame of her red-rimmed glasses up the bridge of her nose, and it reminds Haruka of Rei. He might be put at ease with this comparison, and really it's just a *small* comfort, but he still can't shake the number. 10,710. Haruka knows there's *no way* he'll share the deep details of his life with 10,710 people.

"Why am I being interviewed?" Haruka asks. There were more other interesting swimmers on his team, after all. Yuta, one of his running mates, could talk enough for the entire team, and one of the graduating seniors actually met the famous American Michael Phelps last summer.

"Well, you *do* have the most beautiful stroke on the team." The main reporter, a sports journalist, says. "No one else on your team compares! We want to know about the first-year behind the stroke. Consider it a personality piece for the sports section."

"Ah." To be honest, Haruka doesn't really catch everything she says. He just wants all of this to be over. Haruka makes a mental note *not* to watch his assigned Olympic footage now, just to spite the coach who signed him up for this interview.

The first couple of questions aren't too terrible. Favorite food? *Mackerel*. How long have you been swimming? *A long time, I guess*. Favorite stroke? *Free. Only free*. Other hobbies? *Bathing*.

"Okay, Nanase-san," the second reporter starts with the latest question. "Tell us about Iwatobi. It's a small town, right? How did you get from there to the big city?"

"Plane." Haruka answers bluntly, like he has with all the other questions.

"No, I mean...why Tokyo? According to reports, you got scouting offers from Kyoto, as well. I even see mentions of Australia. Why did you choose Tokyo?"

"Tokyo is nice." Haruka says halfheartedly.

"There must be more than that."

"There isn't."

"I don't believe that."

Haruka sees fireworks with a blink of his eye, and he remembers the words that once pounded into his chest like a swinging cinder block.

I'm going to a university in Tokyo.

No. There's no way he's going to tell 10,710 people what he came to Tokyo for. He tries to spin a lie in his head about the modern facilities the city has to offer, or the allure of metropolitan life, but none come to him. He just sits, staring ahead at the two reporters. He doesn't want to tell them that, *'Well, I followed a boy named Tachibana Makoto here. I think I'm in love with him.'*

Oh.

The realization hits him in that fraction of a moment. The words are imagined, a hypothetical string of speech he'll never dare to utter, not to 10,710 people, not to Makoto, but the sentiment is very, very real. There's no doubt about it if it's Makoto. The reporters are waiting, Haruka knows they're getting antsy with the lack of an answer, but it's not his fault no one warned them about his tendency for silence. He just gets up from his seat in their office, slightly wide-eyed, balled fists shaking, and leaves without another word. He runs down the stairs, out into the sidewalk, and keeps running until he thinks he's going to throw up. He leans over the curb, presses his fingers against his lips, and tries to relieve the heat in his face with repeated sighs.

He's known, *of course he has*, but never has he given the words for it.

Haruka loves Makoto.

Chapter End Notes

Again, I wrote this on the bus coming home so I apologize for any mistakes. I'll get to fixing them eventually!

Anyhoo, this fic has a different tone than Talking to the Moon for sure...I mean, I am writing in Haruka's perspective again, but I'm just in no mood to write angst. I'm actually pretty happy with the numbers theme I have going on, and it was actually supposed to be a really long one shot at first but I didn't come up all the numbers I had in mind yet so I figured I'd go piece by piece.

Let's see...what music did I use for writing this chapter? I guess the most prominent songs this time around were "A World Alone" by Lorde, "Latch (Acoustic)" by Sam Smith, "Horchata" by Vampire Weekend, and "Sloom" by Of Monsters and Men. But mostly the Lorde one, ha ha. I just really like the concept of them being in "a world alone." Anyway, I've had a crazy weekend so I guess this is the end of my notes for now.

the stifled breath

Chapter Summary

Being in love is full of heavy sighs and breaths you'll never catch.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

ATHLETE PROFILE: THE MYSTERY BEHIND NANASE HARUKA

Published June 5th, 2015, 09:00 JST

Nanase Haruka, an aspiring professional swimmer, is quickly becoming known for his beautiful form and promising finishing times in the 100-meter men's freestyle event. Scouted during his third year at Iwatobi High School, Nanase astounded many coaches and scouts with his effortless manner in the water. However, little else is known about this potential Olympic star: who *is* Nanase Haruka?

Upon meeting him, it is clear that he is a man of little words. He much prefers brevity over conversation, indicating a fierce determination to his sport that leaves room for little else, but he did manage to answer some of our questions. In his free time, Nanase likes to bathe, showing a love for water that transcends the pool, and his favorite food is mackerel.

We asked him if he partook in other strokes, since we've only seen footage of his freestyle races. His answer? "Only free." His simple response explains how he came to create such an effortless style, with an assistant coach adding, "there is nothing mechanical about him. He possesses a natural affinity for water, like a fish."

What is unclear, however, is why he decided to come to Tokyo.

Normally a typical question we ask any athlete not from the Tokyo area, this is where the mystery of Nanase Haruka was born. Upon asking him the question, "Why did you come to Tokyo?" he gave his usual blunt answers. When pressed for something a little deeper, Nanase showed a twinge of emotion previously unseen throughout the entire interview. Absolutely engrossed in the question, unable to answer, he abruptly left our offices without another word shortly after.

Of all the athlete profiles we've done over the years, Nanase is definitely one of our most enigmatic. And the question will persist as we watch his professional career unfold: *why Tokyo?*

twenty-seven

Haruka stays behind to pick up all the discarded newspapers after everyone's gone.

"I can't have dinner tonight." He explains to Makoto over the phone as he chucks another bundle of paper into the garbage.

'Ah,' Makoto answers. 'That's okay. Everything all right?'

Haruka looks around the locker room. There's still a few newspapers stacked by the wall, and some scattered on the ground.

"Mhm. Nothing's wrong." Haruka says. "Cleaning duty." That's a half-truth.

He doesn't really have to clean anything, but he's determined to let no one see this embarrassing joke of a newspaper article. The other boys on his swim team, all twenty-seven of them, have all seen it at some point or another today, and have all heckled Haruka for it in varied capacities. One of his senpais actually even called him *mystery boy*, and Haruka only hopes it's a name that won't stick. It's not even particularly clever.

But ultimately Haruka doesn't care about the silly pet names. He'd be annoyed if he remained *mystery boy* for the rest of his college career, but what irks him most is the fact that people are starting to ask questions.

Why Tokyo? It's a question Haruka will never answer truthfully, at least not out loud.

'Oh, that's understandable. I'll try to see you later, then. We can study or something.' Makoto suggests. *'If you want to, that is.'*

It's a strange feeling, wanting nothing more than to be around Makoto, but also wanting to hide from him under his blankets for infinity, *just at the thought of him*. He sighs, something he's been doing way too often lately, but he tries to bring his mouth away from the speaker so Makoto doesn't hear.

"I want to." Haruka says. That's the whole truth.

'Great.' Makoto answers, his voice light. *'I'll head over to your place around eight-thirty, then? Is that okay?'*

"Okay. Bye." Haruka says.

'Bye, Haru.' Makoto hangs up and Haruka just stares at his phone for a couple of seconds before tucking it back into his hoodie pocket. He picks up one of the newspapers, turning to his article in the sports section. A picture of Haruka from high school is embedded next to the article, taken when he wasn't looking at regionals. In the corner of the photograph, Haruka can spot a bit of Makoto's head, and he's smiling that smile he knows anywhere, but the view of him is so slight that no one would notice him there in the first place.

Haruka can't help but think: *your answer is there, but I won't say a word about it.*

With his eyes lingering over the picture, Haruka decides he's done that enough. He throws the newspaper into the garbage, along with all the others, until the locker room is spotless.

Haruka knows he hasn't won, though. There are stacks of them all around the neighborhood still, being read and discarded and thrown around, left on cafe tabletops and front doorsteps. The question has been raised. People are wondering, *why Tokyo?*

Haruka just hopes that Makoto isn't one of them.

four

It was easier when it was the four of them.

'So, Haru-chan, how's everything lately, huh?' Nagisa says over the phone.

"Fine." Haruka answers simply. "Busy."

'You have to give me more than that! How's school? How's swimming? Oh, wait, how about the food? Eat anything good?' Nagisa starts rattling off a bunch of questions that Haruka can't hope to answer with nearly the same speed, but he does concede a small smile for his friend.

"All fine." Haruka answers.

'How's Mako-chan?' Nagisa asks, really putting emphasis on Makoto's name. *'I always seem to call him when he's in class...'*

Haruka pauses at the mention of Makoto's name. "Also fine."

'Also busy?'

"Also busy." Haruka answers back.

'You guys are still together right?'

"Together?" Haruka asks.

'Like...hanging out.' Nagisa says, a little slyly. *'What else would I mean, huh, Haru-chan? Got anything to hide from me?'*

"Oh." Haruka says.

'Oh? What a lackluster response. Gosh, you're scaring me.'

"We're still...hanging out." Haruka finally says.

'Good! I wouldn't expect anything else.'

"Yeah." Haruka says, blushing.

Nagisa is about to say something else, and Haruka can actually almost hear the sound of him breathe in air like ammo for a whole list of questions he has next, but then he hears Rei yelling about something in the background.

'Ah, I should really get back to studying!' Nagisa says to Haruka. *'Big test tomorrow. We should webcam soon, the four of us! We've never done that before, and I want to see your faces!'*

"Okay." Haruka agrees, even if the idea of webcams isn't thrilling to him.

'Bye, Haru-chan!' In the background, Haruka can hear the sound of Rei scolding Nagisa to get serious. With that, there's the sound of a click on Nagisa's end and a dead dial tone.

The four of us. Haruka thinks about that number for a moment. It's a number that belongs to Iwatobi, not Tokyo, so he'll never think of it with any suspicion. It reminds him of ease and it smells like chlorine and sun. He remembers Rei complaining about the lack of aesthetic beauty in his new jammers and Nagisa pouring strawberry powder all over his noodles. There's Makoto of course, in all of his passing memories, in fact he comes into his mind more often than the others when it comes to his hometown, but it's never anything specific like strawberry powdered noodles. Sometimes, Makoto appears with a shadowed face against a pink sunset, or sometimes he's smiling at Haruka from the bottom of those familiar stairs. All Haruka knows is that he's there, in some way. In every way.

It was easier, when it was the four of them. *Haruka, Nagisa, Rei, Makoto.* Through all of their shenanigans, their adventures, their high points, their low points, Haruka never had Makoto in the forefront. He never had to admit anything because he wasn't sure there was anything to begin with. They had small reunions in the airport, walks by the beach, quiet nights in his house: it was a comfort, a love just under the surface, a warm, familiar feeling you could never quite shake off but never quite pinpoint, either. That was Iwatobi.

Here, in Tokyo, Haruka knew that Makoto was here, front and center. That warmth wouldn't stay quiet here—no, it wanted to be confronted.

negative one

Makoto doesn't come over until it's nearly ten.

Haruka is half asleep in the tub when he hears the front door slam. Makoto comes into the bathroom, looking positively frazzled like he's run all the way from the train station. This jolts Haruka into being wide awake again.

Of course Makoto would walk in this way. It's been this way for as long as he can remember.

"Ah, Haru, I'm sorry I'm late!" Makoto says as he's pulling Haruka out of the tub. Haruka takes his hand and tries to ignore the surge of electricity that runs down his back at that precise moment, but he knows he can't quell it when Makoto's face warms up to his usual smile.

No, Haruka realizes it's not the usual actually, judging from the slight frown on his eyebrows. Something's bothering him. There must be a reason he's late.

"Was the train late?" Haruka asks, but he knows it has to be more than that. Makoto leaves the room so Haruka can change into the clothes he's left in the basket. On the other side of the curtain, Haruka can hear Makoto sigh loudly.

When Haruka is done changing, he knows he should go out to meet Makoto, but with his hand on the curtain, about to lift it open, he decides against it. Haruka steps back and leans against the tile of his bathroom wall, leaning over to let the sink run just so Makoto doesn't think anything's out of place. Haruka closes his eyes, exhaling just like Makoto had seconds before, with the sound of his breath masked by the hiss of running water. He just needs a little time. Just the smallest bit.

"No, that's not it." Makoto says.

"Ah." Haruka answers simply. "Then?"

Haruka pulls at the neckline of his shirt, suddenly feeling even more restricted than he usually is by clothing. He looks towards the tub and Haruka thinks maybe he should just jump in again, but this is no normal heat. A bath won't fix anything. The heat dances a taunting little dance all around his body, up and down his back, prickling the backs of his ears and breathing all of his air.

"It's not that important. Hey, are you okay in there?" Makoto asks, changing the subject.

"Yeah." Haruka lies, turning the faucet off and keeping himself over the sink. Just the smallest bit of time. Just a little bit. "What happened?" Haruka asks, trying to stifle the next sigh.

"Well...someone asked me out today, after class." Makoto admits. "I mean, that's why I'm late —"

Haruka lifts himself off the sink. "You went on a date, then."

He's shaking for some reason now, like his skin's about to melt right off his bones if he doesn't stop. He doesn't know what to do, so he begins pacing around the bathroom. The tub? No, the tub won't give him any relief. *Antsy* is the word to describe it. He just looks towards the curtain, how he's just separated from Makoto by two stupid pieces of *fabric*, and he thinks he should just go out and see Makoto, it's no big deal, but it *is*.

"No, Haru, she was really nice and all, but I told her no, and she was really upset about it and she is my friend so I couldn't just—"

"You don't have to lie." Haruka says as casually as he can, drawing closer towards the doorway, towards the curtain, those *two stupid pieces of fabric*.

"I'm not lying!" Makoto raises his voice ever so slightly. He goes quiet afterwards, just for a couple of seconds, and Haruka *really* wants to see what his face looks like at this particular

moment. *How would that face match that silence?* Haruka inches closer to the curtain, ever closer with each passing millisecond of time, and just as he's about to lift the veil, Makoto already does.

"Haru, are you...really..." Makoto says, losing the words momentarily when he almost crashes into Haruka. They don't actually collide, but their bodies come close. Haruka's still wet from his bath, and the apartment still smells like steam and soap, with the lingering air warm and heavy. Makoto just completely forgets what he's about to say, he keeps opening and closing his mouth for words that never come, but Haruka is not much better off.

"Makoto." Haruka's voice is small and almost devoid of all noise, but he knows Makoto can hear. Makoto can always hear Haruka.

They lean in closer, they know they're about to press into each other at this point, with Makoto leaning over because he *really has gotten taller* since they were kids, and Haruka just raises his head to accept him, and he can feel Makoto's breath draw closer, short and panicked and hot as he's still holding the curtain above them. Haruka swears he can feel the skin of his lips brush the surface of Makoto's, that they're just microscopic amounts away, when one of their phones starts blaring loudly.

Haruka and Makoto separate in that instant. Makoto gathers himself enough to answer his phone while Haruka ducks back into the bathroom. He sits in front of the tub, splashing water onto his face to cool himself down. He's still finding it hard to breathe, and he's urging himself to *calm down* more than anything else. *Calm down, calm down, calm down.*

"Haru." Makoto says from the doorway, making Haruka jump again. There's a mix of concern and shyness in his voice. "That was Nagisa. Um...they want to Skype with us later, if you want to." It's clear he's not going to talk about what almost transpired. That's okay, for Haruka. It feels like he's almost died three times over anyway.

"Ah." Haru says simply. "Okay."

Makoto sighs. "Are you...all right, in here? I'm...going to get some air, I think. I'll be back soon."

Haruka still can't look him in the eye, but he just nods against the porcelain of the tub to tell Makoto it's okay. He's leaned in so close near the water that the bangs of his hair break the surface, strand by delicate strand, but Haruka can't bring himself to do anything else but stay where he is. Makoto leaves him without another word, and soon the thud of the front door closing echoes through the empty apartment.

I actually had a lot of fun writing the fake newspaper article in the beginning because I've been doing nothing but reading tech articles all day at my internship...so I might as well make it kinda fun for the purposes of this fic (and my fave ship haha)

I don't really have many notes for this chapter, except that I just wanted to capture that gross feeling you get when you really like someone (or you're in love). I'm very bitter in a personal sense about getting this feeling, like I love it and hate it, but I do enjoy conveying the breathlessness of it...that prickly heat. ANYHOO, I also think I'm doing all right with keeping my word about minimal angst, and I don't foresee too much in the future.

And let's see? What music did I have playing..."With You" by Crystal Fighters was a prominent one. A little bit of Dearly Beloved returned too, but it wasn't on loop.

ANYHOO thanks for reading! I said this would be a short fic but I'm not so sure anymore tbh

a vivid distraction

Chapter Summary

Wet dreams, a rejection, and an infiltration.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

zero

Ever since coming to Tokyo, Haruka hasn't remembered a single dream. Maybe he hasn't had any dreams here to begin with.

Waking up in an empty apartment, in his own bed, Haruka is sure he's had his first in Tokyo. He knows, because checking under the covers and under the fabric of his boxers, he is greeted by a sort of messy surprise that only signifies one thing: *a wet dream*. He sighs, trying to piece together the details, but he knows he doesn't have to think too hard about the cause.

Getting up and pulling off all his clothes, Haruka leaves them in a hamper full of laundry he's neglected for the past week or so. Going towards the bathroom, he lifts the curtain panel, the same one Makoto held open last night when they almost kissed, and pauses. He stands in the doorway for a moment, taking deep, achy breath for a busy Friday morning he's not looking forward to, before going into the bathroom and letting the water run in the tub. He waits until it fills and gets in, leaning his head back against the porcelain.

"*Ma-ko-to*." Haruka mouths syllable by syllable. He's so tired of saying his name like it's taboo.

It's not like he *hasn't* had wet dreams before. Mostly, they're an inconvenience more than anything, a sticky start to an already groggy morning, but he never dwells on them for too long because they're the types of dreams he always forgets. Sometimes, he'll remember a flash of skin or someone calling his name, maybe the sound of an incoherent moan, but at most they're just lingering moments of the imaginary. What is different about this wet dream, about any of the dreams he's had in Tokyo, in fact, is that he remembers this one with alarming detail.

In the dream, he remembers being with Makoto in their old second-year classroom. The sun is setting, the curtains are drawn shut, but there's still enough light peeking through to the point where Makoto's face is painted with a warm glow. In this dream, they're embracing against the wall, but no one exchanges words. It's quiet, but not in the comfortable way Haruka usually knows with the real Makoto.

And then, as if with a sudden flick of a light switch, all the hazy light disappears and the sun is gone. Makoto dives in for a kiss, full on and desperate, as he reaches for one of Haruka's hands in the dark. This is one of the most vivid parts of his dream, mostly because it's Makoto taking his hand, something he's done probably thousands of times in reality, but he's *different* here. Instead of firm and reliable in his usual grip, he's teasing and slow, interlacing his fingers one by one, drawing on Haruka's skin with the delicate stroke of his fingers. His touch is unfamiliar.

'Make it real,' the breeze whispers through a crack in the window.

Haruka remembers fully meeting each of Makoto's kisses with needier ones of his own. And it's not that he can't get enough, *well*, maybe that's part of the reason, but it's more like his mind knows this Makoto, tearing off the buttons of his shirt and reaching down his pants, isn't the real thing. Every kiss is a manhunt, a pleading mission to find the real Makoto. *'Maybe one more kiss will wake him up,'* his mind echoes. But even as the both of them undress, even though Haruka can feel his skin on this Makoto's skin, Haruka just knows he's not what he's looking for. He knows this when Makoto touches him in places no one's ever touched him before, and he knows this when they eventually have sex against the imagined walls. It's not Makoto.

'Make it real,' howls the wind, with building ferocity.

And the minute Makoto whispers his name, just one small *'Haru'* in a world of near-silence, two bodies melted together against a creaking, wooden desk, the dream ends. At least, that's the last part Haruka remembers.

Haruka's not really sure when he even came during the night. It was probably during the imagined sex, or maybe when Makoto was handling him with those hands of his, but all Haruka knows is that none of this satisfies him. The dream may have satiated whatever physical inclinations he had towards Makoto, but it doesn't fix anything else that troubles his mind.

Makoto's not actually here with him.

'Make it real,' his mind continuously taunts him, even in the most vivid of dreams.

Haruka just sighs, closes his eyes, and submerges himself under the water. He's tired of thinking this much.

080-0817-2134

"I like you."

Haruka stares down at the phone number written on the scrap of paper while the other boy talks. The scene is almost romantic, the two of them standing under separate umbrellas in the heavy downpour, all quiet except for the *pitter-patter* of rain. The other boy, a stranger to Haruka, is blushing like crazy in his high school uniform, his words stumbling out in hushed

tones as he tries to explain how he even knows Haruka in the first place, but Haruka can do nothing but stare ahead, emptily listening to his mouth move without listening. He makes out some words like *swimming* and *admire* and *beautiful*, but he doesn't really care to deduce the rest.

"So, well...will you go out with me?" He finally asks, loudly over the *pitter-patter*. It's the only thing Haruka hears completely. He doesn't even know this boy's name. His features, to Haruka, are as grey and lifeless as the sky above them.

Haruka blinks a couple of times before averting his gaze to the side.

"No," he responds simply. "Sorry."

"Why? Is it because I'm too young?" He asks.

'You're not Makoto.'

"Am I too short?"

'You're not Makoto.'

"You don't like boys, then?"

'You're not Makoto.'

"I'm just not interested." Haruka says, his voice slightly raised.

Haruka watches the other boy's face crumble for a moment, all hope eradicated, before bouncing back with a conciliatory smile. He sighs and nods to himself, still looking rather pitiful in the end.

"Well, it was worth a shot." He says, more out of relief than anything, it seems.

"Sure."

Haruka just wants to go now. This person is no one to him, in all honesty, and with every second he stays he just feels more awkward about where he stands.

'So this is what it's like,' he thinks. He wonders if this is what Makoto has to deal with every time a girl confesses to him, how often he tells himself, *'I just want to leave,'* and how many times he still ends up staying with her afterwards. Makoto's always too kind to leave right away. Haruka then wonders if he's gotten any confessions from boys like this too, under an umbrella in an *almost* romantic rainstorm full of soft *pitter-patters* and hushed tones, but then he realizes he's thinking too much about Makoto again. He scolds himself silently for not being able to stop.

He's excused himself for the wet dream, and the entire weekend that he was away from him, but Makoto is becoming a *distraction*.

But before Haruka completely shuts him out of his mind, he recalls the brushing of their lips and the lingering of steam.

"Hello?"

"Huh?" Haruka snaps his mind away from Makoto in that instant.

"I asked a question," answers the boy made of grey.

"Oh." Haruka says, not really interested in entertaining questions. "Well, I'm going to go." He's about to turn his back on the stranger, to catch the next train so he can make swim practice on time today.

"Wait!" He says. Haruka lets out a sigh and stops.

"What?"

"Do you have someone then?" He asks, out of breath. "Do you have someone special?"

Haruka's been getting that question a lot, lately.

'Do you have someone special?' The boy in front of him asks.

'You got anyone?' His teammate ponders.

'Why Tokyo?' The reporter inquires.

The answer, of course, is *Makoto*. There's no one else and Haruka knows this by now, but none of *them* are worthy of knowing. Not some acquaintance he runs with from time to time, not any newspaper reporter searching for a story, not this random, featureless boy under a separate umbrella--*none of them*. Makoto is his little secret, his hideaway, even if Tokyo's got all their eyes on him.

"Well, do you?" The other boy asks again. "I'd like to know."

He's had enough. Haruka just closes his umbrella, feels the rain start to soak his skin, and walks away without another word. Tokyo's just going to have to get used to his silence.

one hundred

Haruka sneaks into the lecture hall and takes a seat in the back so Makoto won't see him. Makoto's not hard to spot though, because he's wearing that red flannel shirt he's been so fond of lately, and *well*, Haruka has to admit that he knows the view of his back from anywhere.

Tearing his stares away from Makoto, Haruka just sighs, glancing over at the other hundred kids in the room. Some of them are focused like Makoto, but most others are half asleep (or *really* asleep) in their seats. Haruka can't blame any of them for that, since it's an evening

lecture about the *advanced prevention of athletic injury and care*. How much would *anyone* ever need to know about wrapping gauze? How *advanced* did it have to get?

Glancing over at Makoto, Haruka watches him push his glasses right up his nose. Still focused.

It's been three days since the near-kiss. The day after it happened, it was a Friday, so Haruka didn't get to see Makoto in the first place because of his volunteering, and the rest of his weekend was spent entertaining a few semi-distant relatives that also lived in Tokyo. It was an awkward exchange, pretending to pay attention to his aunt talk about a recent vacation to wherever it was she went, nodding along when all he could think about was Makoto's lips just barely brushing against his. It was even more uncomfortable when he started thinking about the *dream* he had about him.

But it's the near-kiss his mind lingers on more.

The memory of it *still* repeats itself over and over again: Makoto holding up the fabric of the curtain, how tall he is and how much he has to lean over to reach Haruka, Haruka's toes raising just a slight bit as he raises his head to meet him. He can't stop thinking about the soap-scented steam that lingered hot and heavy around them, or Makoto's breath against the skin of Haruka's cheek. And then he remembers Makoto's eyes closing first, slowly but surely, before Haruka's does the same.

And more often than not, in these recollections, Haruka just thinks of going further. His mind always wanders to this point. He looks up at Makoto again, who's now slightly hunched over his desk area in diligent note taking, and he wonders what it'd be like to hold onto his back with his fingers firmly dug into his skin. *The real thing*. He imagines Makoto's voice in his ear, a soft '*Haru,*' while Haruka's laying under him. Never mind about wet dreams or imagined worlds.

"Hey, you're dripping onto my textbook. Go sit somewhere else."

This takes Haruka out of his daydream, but he figures it's for the best anyway. He can't afford to get so hot and bothered in class, even if it's one he doesn't belong to. The guy next to Haruka is glaring right at him, clicking his tongue and shifting his books away.

"*Asshole.*" The stranger says next.

Haruka exchanges dirty looks with him, more annoyed than anything, and shakes his head, his hair still wet from walking in the rain. This only makes the stranger more agitated, to the point where he gets up from his seat and causes his chair under him to screech loudly. The professor stops what he's saying mid-sentence about treating shoulder tendonitis, looking straight to the back of the room.

"Something wrong?" The professor asks, more out of curiosity than anything.

Naturally, a lot of the other students look over their shoulders to see what's going on, too. Makoto is no exception. His eyes go wide when he sees that Haruka's one of the perpetrators,

that he's even willingly sitting in a class he doesn't belong to *in the first place*. Haruka just gives a small wave before tucking his hands back into his pockets innocently.

'Why are you here?' Makoto's face signals. He's shaking his head.

Haruka shrugs. Soon, everyone's attention slowly fades back to the front of the room and the professor resumes speaking. Makoto turns his head away for just a moment before he starts initiating a series of quick looks over the shoulder, always straight at Haruka.

Flicking his head towards the front of the room, Haruka signals for his best friend to keep paying attention. Haruka may have time to be distracted at the moment, but Makoto doesn't. He just sighs a bit and nods, conceding defeat, picking his pencil up again from his desk. Before he goes back to taking notes, he just looks back once more at Haruka.

Makoto's eyes lower while a small frown, before settling into a more relaxed smile.

'Dinner?' he seems to ask as his eyebrows raise ever so slightly.

'Dinner,' Haruka answers with a short nod of his head, but his mind's pleading for something different.

'Make it real.'

Chapter End Notes

This chapter is relatively, well, nothing in terms of advancing their relationship, but I didn't want to rush into them mushing faces (for real, at least) and getting together. I'm just all about the slow build, and I'm sorry you have to bear with me. (I think I have like two or three more chapters planned?) I have a magical realism fic still on the back burner with a talking cat or a Ghost and Photographer AU I'm sort of thinking about it. I'm not sure? I'm never sure!

I actually wrote this chapter kind of out of order, and I wasn't really sure how to begin. It's actually really funny how I decided on the idea of wet dreams, actually...I was randomly thinking of Degrassi: The Next Generation and that one episode where JT (I think) wakes up from a wet dream. (This is such an embarrassing piece of information but I'm an embarrassment in general so it's cool...) ALSO, major kudos as usual to Haruki Murakami because his written sex dream sequences are really funky and weird (a notorious thing of his if you read enough of him) and I was inspired. (I'll probably never get as creative as him though lol)

But long story short, I whipped out my iPad on the train and started writing. (I write all my MakoHaru fic on public transportation...if you ever spot me on the 7 train in NYC come holla at me so we can discuss MakoHaru ha) (Or if you're near 30 Rock!!!)

ANYWAY, no musical inspiration this time around, well, nothing on repeat that is. Maybe "I'm Not in Love" by 10cc and "September" by The Shins, but they're not particularly MakoHaru themed to me. I also played a lot of Crystal Fighters because I love the Crystal Fighters.

THANKS FOR READING! Always appreciated. (◡‿◡✿) I had a lot more to say today.

(Oh you can also follow me on @asplendidmoon on twitter but I'm boring)

and i will meet you

Chapter Summary

In which Haruka finds Makoto by the water.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

¥1150

"My treat today." Makoto says. "You made dinner last time." He hands over the money from his wallet and sits next to Haruka at the table, at their usual place in the back of their favorite restaurant. It's a bit musty here, with faded wooden panel walls and minimal decorations, but Haruka enjoys the simplicity well enough. Makoto doesn't seem to mind it here either, since he's always the one to suggest coming here.

Haruka says a small "*thank you*," somehow embarrassed at Makoto's gesture. He opens and closes his mouth, rewording and sounding out the things he wants to say, but he just can't find it in him. Hiding his hands in his pockets, he clenches them tightly so they stop shaking so much.

Pretending to fix a crick in his neck, Haruka sneaks a glance at Makoto. He's incredibly adept at those, even if Makoto *does* catch him sometimes. Makoto seems completely unbothered by anything, making small talk with the chef that's preparing their ramen, with his fingers absentmindedly flipping through pages of his workbook on the countertop. Haruka can't help but stare, looking for *any* sign of distress, for any slight frown in his eyebrows, for any nervous twitch, for any forced smile, but Makoto seems just fine.

This is one of those times Makoto catches Haruka staring. He just turns his head towards his best friend and smiles a little, his eyes lowering into that familiar dreaminess Haruka's known for years now. The look subsides as the chef and a busboy bring out two steaming bowls of ramen for Haruka and Makoto.

"Ah! Thanks." Makoto nods his head towards the cook. "Perfect for a rainy day like this."

"I made sure to add the extra for your friend. That'll be a hundred more yen." The chef says with a toothy grin.

"No problem." Makoto laughs a little.

Haruka looks down at his ramen and spots a plump flank of mackerel sitting on top of all the other dressings, grilled immaculately and topped off with a scallion garnish. His eyes go wide and he looks straight at Makoto.

"Is this...?"

"I knew you'd like it." Makoto says, with a small sigh and a laugh. "It's always mackerel with you. True love." He jokes.

Haruka, in all gratitude, is about to blurt out another quiet *'thank you'* before the front door bursts open and the jingle of a bell ornament goes off. It's a bunch of university students, all laughing and talking loudly about something Haruka can't catch. The chefs seem to know them all, as do the locals, and it's apparent they come here regularly as well. In excitement, one of them points towards the back of the room, straight at Makoto. Some of the others wave and call his name.

"Ah, Tachibana!" One of the boys calls. Makoto just puts his chopsticks down and waves back.

"Hey!" Makoto says. "I didn't know you guys came here."

"I think we were the ones that *suggested* it to you in the first place. How forgetful." One of the girls corrects him.

"Tokyo *does* have a lot of restaurants." Makoto retorts. The girl clicks her tongue but ends up laughing. From there Haruka watches the group devolve into jumbled noise, into conversations about things Haruka will never understand. Everyone's interrupting each other about the strange man they saw at the library computers, or how *positively* boring the professor was today, or how the vending machine in building one totally ate someone's money. Makoto doesn't really have much to contribute himself, but he's nodding along like he understands.

In the group, Haruka makes out two boys, one tall and one stout, and three girls. One of them is touting a guitar case, and one of the others looks positively too frazzled to even look Makoto in the eye. It doesn't take long for Haruka to deduce that this is *the* friend group: the two former swimmers, the girl who plays guitar for an underground band, the girl who *may* or *may not* have partaken in flower arranging (*or was it tea ceremony?*) and the last one who has actually *confessed* to Makoto. Haruka has never imagined he'd ever see them in the flesh, that'd they'd actually materialize into real, living people.

It's a strange phenomenon, meeting your friends' other friends.

One of the former swimmers, the taller one, narrows his eyes when he spots Haruka.

"Say...don't I know you from somewhere?" He asks.

"Introduce us!" The other swimmer commands Makoto.

Haruka just feels like dunking his face into his bowl and drowning in it. He didn't sign up for forced socializing tonight. He wouldn't sign up for that on *any* night. Makoto can sense Haruka's discomfort, so he actually leans out of his chair slightly to shield his smaller best friend, but this doesn't stop his new friends from prying anyway.

"Oh, come on." One of the other girls says. "Wait! Is this the friend you're always ditching us for? *Haru*?" She says, trying to peek over Makoto's shoulder. "It's him, isn't it? Always *Haru* this and *Haru* that."

"Ah! Well..." It's clear that Makoto's embarrassed, but he's holding his ground well enough.

"We're trying to eat." Haruka mumbles, getting agitated.

"*Haru*?" The taller boy asks. "I thought I knew you from somewhere!" He digs into his bag and produces a worn-out looking newspaper, crumpled and yellowing, but Haruka knows instantly what that is. "You're Nanase Haruka!" The boy says, flipping to the sports section.

Makoto looks at Haruka. "When did you...?" He doesn't have a chance to finish his sentence when Haruka gets out of his chair, snatches the newspaper away, and leaves right out the door without his messenger bag or jacket. He can hear Makoto call his name, '*Haru*,' with his voice slightly raised, but Haruka just runs off, faster and faster so Makoto can't hope to catch up or find him right away. He stops when he finally reaches an alleyway, crouching down under the light of a streetlamp. He looks for the article, finds his picture, and immediately rips that part of the newspaper to shreds, but Haruka knows there's no point.

Makoto belongs to a new world now, heavy with whispers of a different language, and they're going to tell him about *mystery boy Nanase Haruka*.

'*Why Tokyo?*' they'll ask him, and Haruka knows it's just a question Makoto will ask himself too, upon realizing that he actually doesn't know the answer.

"Why Tokyo?" Makoto might ask Haruka. No, he *will* ask. He won't be so outright, with those two blunt words, but he'll find a way to edge the question in. It'll be a subtle operation, an ease into the uncomfortable.

And Haruka *knows* he won't want to explain, no matter how gentle Makoto is about things.

But he also won't have the heart to lie.

three-fourths

There is a voicemail on Haruka's phone, exactly three-fourths of a minute long.

He looks down at the blinking icon, how it pleads *please listen to me*, before tucking his phone back into his pants pocket. He doesn't have to guess too hard about who it's from, but it doesn't mean he has to listen to it. Haruka imagines Makoto's still with his friends, all of them chattering away while he's staring down at his phone for any sort of response.

Haruka can't say he's *jealous* of those five friends. He doesn't think it's even a matter of jealousy. It's predictable that Makoto would make friends so easily, but Haruka is also certain no one else will ever understand Makoto in the way he does. Someone might ask Makoto to watch a horror movie without knowing how scared of them he is, or they might take him to the beach without seeing him flinch at the sight of the ocean. It's not a matter of something

like *envy*. Of all the uncertainties in Tokyo, of all the new people and places and sensations, Haruka will never have to worry that someone knows Makoto more than he does.

Makoto and Haruka will always come from the same world, a separate realm that no one else will ever penetrate. But that doesn't mean they're not going to explore new universes, too.

No, it has never been about *jealousy*. Makoto can take in all that Tokyo has to offer, and he *should*, as much as Haruka should too. There will be things about Tokyo they won't share. Makoto will have his five friends, Haruka will have his running mates. They'll have their own preferred train routes, their favorite neighborhood convenience stores, their own places to buy apples and shoes and books--the list is countless, and Haruka is fine with this. Tokyo is just too big of a city to do *everything* together.

Haruka just doesn't want anyone, not anyone of those 13,188,998 people, prying into the secret world they've built for themselves. It's a place where only they can hide away.

Population: **two**. Haruka and Makoto.

The train lurches into Haruka's stop and people start to file out of the car. Haruka steps out onto the platform and takes his phone out of his pocket, feeling just a little bad for ignoring Makoto for the past twenty minutes or so. There are three missed calls and that single forty-five second voicemail, the last of which Haruka decides to listen to after all.

"Haru? Where'd you go? You know..." There's a bit of silence, as if Makoto's trying to figure out what to say. *"You really do worry me sometimes, running off like that. We don't have to see each other tonight, if you feel like being alone, but let me know you're all right somehow. And, well..."* Another beat of silence. *"Never mind. It's something I should ask in person, I think."*

There's a small *beep* after that to signify the end of the message. Haruka takes a deep breath and shakes his head clear of any clutter, of all the different ways Makoto might ask the question.

But never mind about that, Haruka thinks to himself as he gets out of the station and walks down the block, to a pool that's already closed for the night. Maybe it's just one of those nights where he has to swim alone.

"You really do worry me sometimes." Makoto's voice still reverberates through the static.

Haruka takes his phone out again and goes to the message window he keeps open for Makoto.

I'm okay. Haruka texts. He's about to just leave it like that, before deciding to add something else. **I'm going swimming.**

A text message comes back not ten seconds later. **Swimming? Now?**

Yes, now. Haruka texts back.

You ran away to SWIM? You don't even have a towel. You left it with me!

Haruka sighs. Of course Makoto would chide him from that. **It's fine**, he texts.

Do you need me to bring it to you? Makoto texts back.

No, it's nothing.

Haruka waits for the next message to arrive, and it does, within thirty seconds.

I'm coming to you, anyway.

11:34:57

Haruka has already swum twenty-three laps by the time Makoto gets to the pool. Still half-submerged in the water, with nothing but the moon illuminating the darkness of the pool hall, Haruka watches his best friend pick up his discarded clothes from the floor and wave them around, almost as if that's a scolding in itself. Haruka just stands there, at the shallow end of the pool, waiting for him to actually say something. Instead, Makoto just sighs, tucks Haruka's clothes under his arm, and gives up a small smile.

"This should have been the first place I checked." Makoto laughs. "I'm losing my touch."

Haruka shrugs. "I was just riding the train for a little while. Just got here, really."

"Well, if I got here first, I could have waited for you to come."

"There's no way of knowing I would." Haruka says.

Makoto just crouches down near Haruka, hovering over his lane. "Well, you *told* me you'd be here, didn't you?"

It's his way of saying, *well, you wanted me here*.

Haruka just blushes, turning his head away and ducking underwater altogether. It's the only way Makoto won't see how red he's getting in the face. He swims under the lanes and reemerges by one of the other walls, but Makoto just calmly walks over to him again, offering a hand that Haruka usually takes. This time Haruka just stares up at him, unable to find the right words to say.

"Hey," Makoto says. "You've already got early practice in the morning. Why don't you swim then?"

Haruka shakes his head. "I'm staying here."

"Then I will, too."

"You have an early day tomorrow." Haruka argues.

"So do you. We'll just be tired together, then." Makoto takes a seat on the tile, removing his shoes and wading his feet in the water. Haruka just stays by the wall, taking in the silence. He's not asking the question, but Haruka knows better than to let his guard down about this. Makoto knows how to ease into things more than anyone, and that's what makes being with him so dangerous at the moment.

"Go home." Haruka finally says.

Makoto sighs. "Is that what you really want?"

Haruka doesn't answer.

"Haru."

"What?"

"You're feeling weird about the kiss, aren't you?" Makoto asks. "In your apartment."

"That wasn't a kiss." Haruka says. "It was an *almost*-kiss."

"Whatever it is you want to call it...kissing, *almost* kissing. The point is, well..." Makoto looks out the window for a moment, gathering the right words to say. "I mean, you don't feel it? Like things have been changing since we got to Tokyo?"

"A lot of things have changed." Haruka deflects back.

"I know this is difficult to talk about." Makoto admits. "I didn't think I'd ever have to this conversation with you...I mean, *no*, that's not right. I *mean*, part of me has always known something like this would happen, we *are* always together and...well, you know...ah, my words are getting all mixed up." Makoto's trying to mask his embarrassment with a small laugh and that signature head nod of his, but Haruka can see how much his hands are shaking. Neither one of them has the words for this. Not tonight, at least.

"Then let's not...talk about it." Haruka says rather breathlessly, grabbing onto Makoto's wrist from the water. Makoto looks towards him, confused and flushed and excited all in one instance.

"We should, though." Makoto says quietly, holding Haruka's hand back, fingers lacing his, one by one.

"Not yet." Haruka asserts, yanking Makoto closer to him and kissing him from the water. It only takes about a second for Makoto to reciprocate. The kissing starts off gently, a foray into the unknown, before the both of them start pressing into each other much more urgently.

"Haru." Makoto whispers in between kisses.

This time, it's real, a little wet, and certainly more awkward than Haruka has ever envisioned, but the fact is that he's actually *kissing* Makoto, and Makoto is actually kissing him back. This is no empty dream, or an *almost*-kiss in the doorway of his bathroom. Makoto gently places his hand on the back of Haruka's head, pulling him closer, both of them longing for

each other in ways they never thought possible, before he completely grabs Haruka out of the pool. It doesn't take long for them to resume kissing by the poolside, with Haruka straddled over Makoto's legs, still soaking wet from head to toe. Makoto just wraps his arms around Haruka's waist and initiates another kiss, diving in towards Haruka's lips with short, excited breaths.

"Ma...koto." Haruka breathes.

Haruka's beginning to shiver, and he knows it has nothing to do with just coming out of the water. He has never wanted *anyone* like he's wanted Makoto, and for all of this to be happening is both nauseating and exhilarating. Haruka throws both of his arms around Makoto's neck, tearing away from him to catch his breath for a moment as Makoto does the same. He breathes into Makoto's ear, dizzy and terrified and ridiculously happy, relenting a small smile as he just hugs Makoto closer so he can't see.

"What is this, Haru?" Makoto asks, after a moment of silence, both of them still out of breath. "What...are we?"

He separates himself from Makoto again to answer, and he knows he should, but no words come to him. They refuse to form. All he knows, in this exact moment, of this exact second of this exact minute of this exact hour, is that he just wants to keep kissing Makoto. That's all he knows about anything.

Haruka looks out the window. The rain is still falling outside, the *pitter-patter* of each drop highlighting every second of Haruka's silence.

"Haru." Makoto murmurs again.

Haruka just stares back at Makoto, shaking his head, moving closer and closer towards his best friend, with their lips about to meet again.

And as they *do* meet again, Haruka thinks that this should be enough of an answer for Makoto.

Chapter End Notes

I'm at my friend's chicken farm for the weekend for her annual October Fest party so I am literally publishing this from the basement of a house on a CHICKEN FARM. It's really cool and kind of a weird sentence to be even typing out, haha. Anyhoo, useless tidbit of information from me again.

You guys wanted them to smush faces last time and YAY THEY DID! I've written them kissing before (in my two other fics) and I wanted to think of a new place to kiss??? Idk

I like the pool setting for kissing because it seems like Haruka would be more in his element doing it there ahahaha.

Let's see...short commentary today but what was my music for this chapter?
Hmm...well, I guess the whole soundtrack for The Guardians of the Galaxy? Strange music selection but whatever.

Anyhoo, off I go to roam with the chickens~ There might be mistakes, which I'll fix later!!

the newness of things

Chapter Summary

Haruka wonders if this is what being in love is like: breathing in lightness and exhaling small proclamations.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

one thousand, seven-hundred, and forty

“Turn it off.”

Haruka’s alarm seems a little bit louder this morning.

“Haru, you have to wake up for swim practice.” Makoto groans, half-asleep. With Haruka still wrapped around him, Makoto just places a gentle hand on his back and shakes him more awake, but this only makes Haruka latch onto the other boy closer as petty vengeance.

“Ah...come on, now.” Makoto says.

“*Turn it off.*” Haruka grumbles again, knocking his phone onto the ground from the nightstand with a blind swipe of his hand. He just yawns deeply and nestles further into Makoto’s chest, pressing his face into the warm fabric of his shirt. Haruka can feel Makoto lean his head against his in defeat, resting his nose in Haruka’s hair with a huffy sigh.

“I don’t want to make you late.”

“It’s nothing,” Haruka says, his voice muffled.

If every morning’s going to be like this, with the both of them tangled up in each other, Haruka knows they’re not going to get anything done. He’s about to drift off into sleep again, snug and comfortable, prepared to stay in bed all day if he has to, before he feels Makoto prop him up with a hand on his waist. With both of them sitting up in bed, Makoto supporting him from completely laying back on the sheets, Haruka just collapses into the nape of Makoto’s neck and intends to go right back to snoozing right there. The alarm is still blaring on the ground, but neither one of them are doing anything about it.

“*Practice.*” Makoto says again, softly into Haruka’s ear. He seems more awake now, letting a few breathy laughs escape as Haruka just refuses to get off of him. *This is absolutely Makoto’s fault*, Haruka thinks, for being the way that he is: Makoto’s hold on him is firm, radiating the right kind of warmth that is neither too stifling or too light. In his hazy thoughts,

Haruka comes to the conclusion that sleeping next to Makoto is the epitome of what they call *finding a happy medium*.

Haruka already says this a lot, but it can't be any truer on this particular morning: he is really not ready for the day.

"Give me a second." Haruka says, wrapping one of his arms across Makoto's waist.

This isn't the first time Makoto has slept over in his apartment, but they've never been like this, together in the same bed. It was already near one in the morning by the time the two of them were done kissing by the poolside, and it was clear that Makoto couldn't go all the way back to his dorm. Him sleeping over was an unspoken agreement, the same type of pact they'd used to make in Iwatobi whenever Haruka stayed at Makoto's too long into the night, but there was a certain urgency about having him come over this time.

When Haruka begins kissing Makoto on the neck, brushing his lips against his skin ever so gently, he knows that urgency still remains.

Kissing? Check. (A thousand checks, really, since last night.)

Cuddling? Check. (And Haruka figures they'll be more of where that came from.)

And other things? Well, Haruka's mind just turns into incomprehensible static with the thought of *other things*.

"Haru...ah." Makoto says, taking Haruka by the shoulders and pushing him away. "You're going to leave a hickey."

Haruka shrugs. "I wouldn't know. I just wanted to kiss." He watches Makoto's face crumble into a blushing mess with that last sentence, and it doesn't take too long for him to cover his mouth with his hand. Daytime Makoto certainly gets more flustered than the one Haruka met in the night.

"Don't get me wrong, I want to...*do stuff*...but--"

Haruka blinks. "*Stuff?*" If there is any way for Haruka to really wake up, this is it. Curiosity fuels the both of them, since he's certain neither one of them have done *anything* with *anyone* before this. But Makoto just stares at Haruka, meeting his question with momentary silence.

"I mean...I want to kiss you...and...*touch* you, and..." Makoto tries to find the next words, but he gets caught in a silent stutter before holding his mouth shut, shaking his head. "*No*. We should get up! You're going to be late. I don't want you to be late!" He takes Haruka's hand and hops out from under the blankets, picking up the ringing phone off the ground, shutting off the alarm, and tugging Haruka out from the bed.

Haruka just lays back down, hand still in Makoto's, and sighs softly up at ceiling. "I don't care about being late." He wants to say something else like '*I just want to be with you*,' but the words just sour and disintegrate on his tongue before he can say it.

"Well, *I* care about you being late." Makoto says, relenting a smile, though it looks more exasperated than anything. "Let's go, Haru. I'll even set the grill up for you so you can make breakfast."

Haruka digs his face in the pillow, still not letting go of Makoto's hand. It should be easy enough to say '*I just want to be with you,*' after all the kissing and entangling themselves in his bed for the night, but he can't. It's just not the time. Giving up on any sort of play from Makoto, Haruka peeks up from the pillow and finds Makoto crouching down close to Haruka.

"Makoto." Haruka murmurs.

Makoto lays a kiss on Haruka's lips, holding his cheek with a free hand and separating shortly after.

"Do you want to get out of bed now?" he asks calmly, thinking that could appease the other boy.

Haruka grabs Makoto's red flannel shirt and kisses him a little bit more, and soon it turns into them picking up where they left off the night before. Makoto just kneels over the bed as Haruka wraps his arms around him, both of them breathing each other in and going in with kisses that come in slow and light like the early morning.

"I'm ready now." Haruka says after what feels like their lips meeting for the hundredth time.

Makoto just shuts his lips tight, as if restraining himself from just overcoming Haruka with any further action. He nods with a little sigh, knowing full well they both have busy schedules ahead of them. Makoto settles for one more kiss on the forehead before Haruka sits up and actually makes an effort to start the day.

After all the kissing, his subsequent daze about the previous night's encounters, and the general fatigue from the lack of sleep, Haruka leaves his apartment twenty-nine minutes later than usual with slowed and dragging steps. And as he waves goodbye to Makoto at the station, who's rushing to catch the next train back to the dorms, Haruka's not sure if he minds losing those 1740 seconds; at least he's *actually* gotten himself out of bed, and the day can go on as usual, all while getting to have just a bit of Makoto in the morning.

Maybe *usual* isn't the word. He'll carry on with his day, swimming with the team and running with his mates, eating his lunch alone and going to afternoon lectures, but a question will periodically enter his mind between both the empty gaps in thought and the times he should be paying attention.

'So this is what being in love is like, isn't it?'

three-hundred and sixty-five

"The one-year is absolutely the most important! *One whole year*? That's something worth celebrating, isn't it?"

"I would think so."

"I'd say fifty is the number to shoot for."

"Like *you'd* ever make it to fifty."

Haruka hears the boys bicker about the merit of celebrating anniversaries, and he secretly lowers the volume on his music player so he can hear them better. They're all warming up before their bi-weekly run around the park, and the first ten minutes before their actual workout is always filled with inane chatter. Haruka's encountered a lot of subjects with them already, with everything from favorite swimwear brands, pet lizards, memorable horror movie plots, to everything in between. Usually, Haruka never really pays *too* much attention, nor does he ever really contribute to the conversations if they're not interesting to him, but there's one topic he's been giving his attention to.

Sometimes the boys talk about love in all its various forms--falling *in*, falling *out*, dates, dinners, gifts, and anniversaries, and lately Haruka's been listening. He never means to care so much about their gossip, but honing in on whatever it is they have to say helps with whatever new arrangement he has with Makoto. Haruka hates to admit it, but he *is* a novice in all of this, and any help, no matter how sneakily obtained, is appreciated.

"Anniversaries are stupid, though. Why does anyone ever need to force things with big events like that? It's just spending more money that you don't have."

"Yeah, I *guess*, but it makes things tangible." One of the other boys says. "I mean...you want to think of it a certain way?"

Tangible. Haruka's not even sure what that means at this point. Does kissing and sleeping with Makoto make their new union *tangible* enough?

"Sure. Explain."

"Well, some people have a harder time saying things like *I love you* than others. So, you know, the other person might still want that missing *I love you* they usually don't get in words. I think anniversaries are important for those people...measure your affections in time." His teammate, Yuta, really *is* the talkative one out of the three.

Time. If Haruka wants to count all of his time with Makoto in Iwatobi, he has spent more time with him than all three of these boys and any of their current and former lovers combined. It's a lot more than three-hundred and sixty-five days, and it might as well be *fifty* years with the way young people usually run in and out of each other's lives. Haruka can't help but feel proudly smug about this, but he just holds his phone up to his mouth to hide the smile he's failing to hide from his face.

And then he pictures himself saying *I love you* to Makoto with *actual* words, but the thought of doing it fills him with a strange sort of dread.

"It's like, *well*, if we've stuck together for this long, without separating or either one of you wanting to part ways, that's saying something! Anniversaries are important."

Haruka thinks about his own *anniversary*, if he can ever qualify for that. He really can't produce anything quantifiable like years, since he's literally been with Makoto for as long as he can remember. He'll never know the precise hour or day he met Makoto, or how many years they've known each other. He can't just go up to Makoto and ask, *hey, 'how long have you been in my life?'* because Makoto won't know the answer, either. Asking that just seems too sentimental to begin with anyway.

"Well, if you're with someone for too long, wouldn't you want to know there's still something *there* from time to time? I wouldn't wait for some yearly *anniversary*."

"All I'm saying is that I don't want to pay for presents. I didn't ask for life coaching."

Yuta just laughs. "I guess you're right. I'm not training to be a philosopher. We're probably boring Nanase out of his mind, too."

Haruka takes his earbuds off and pretends he hasn't been following the conversation. "What?" He asks, to top off his feigned ignorance.

"We're talking about *relationship* stuff." Someone else adds. "Not your thing, right, Nanase?"

Haruka's face betrays him for a moment, but he can't help how much his eyes light up at the thought of the *newness of things* he has with Makoto. He tries to avert his gaze from the rest of them, staring down at a pebble on the ground instead, but the other boys have already started sneering and cackling.

"*Ooh*, Nanase's got someone now, huh?" Yuta asks. "Welcome to the club."

"Do you *really*? Ah, am I really the only single one left in the group?"

"Stop jumping to conclusions!" Another one of them says. "Let him tell you himself. Don't think you'll get an answer, though."

"I..." Haruka starts saying, letting the word accidentally slip out of his mouth. "*I do*." He says rather shyly, to the point where you wouldn't be able to hear him say the words if you didn't get close enough.

"What?!"

"What are they like?! I imagine you like someone in glasses, for some reason..."

Haruka doesn't dare to try to entertain any of their other questions. He just shrugs off whatever he's just said and starts running off without them, his steps feeling airy and effortless. He wants to scold himself for saying anything to his teammates, because it's something he usually wouldn't do at all, but he can't bring himself to. Despite starting his day twenty-nine minutes late, pushing through a whole morning's worth of Olympic style drills, and now *running* for another hour and a half, Haruka can't feel anything but light. The air just seems crisper, and his body just feels loose and relaxed.

And it's not like he'd ever share the secret world he has with Makoto, no, that's not his intention in the slightest bit, but he's starting to think that it's okay to let them know this place exists.

'So this is what being in love is like, isn't it?'

eight zero five

“You’ve been wearing that shirt for two days.”

“It’s about to be *three* if I stay at your apartment again.” Makoto sighs. “People are starting to wonder if this is the only shirt I own. It’s becoming a problem.”

“You *do* wear it a lot.” Haruka says.

The two of them get in the elevator at Haruka’s apartment complex, letting the quietness of the small space overtake whatever conversation they were just having on the sidewalk. Both of them are beyond tired from a long day of classes and training, and Haruka wants nothing more than to take a bath and crawl into bed. Haruka just leans his head against Makoto’s shoulder as the elevator lurches upward, and it doesn’t take long for Makoto to take his hand into his.

“You can borrow one of mine.” Haruka says quietly, closing his eyes.

“That’d be a tight fit.” Makoto just laughs.

“No, I have that orange shirt. That’s yours.”

“So *that’s* where it went? You stole it from me!”

“And you’re not getting it back.” Haruka says bluntly. “*Borrowing* only.” He doesn’t want to admit it, but it’s one of his favorite shirts.

“I’m kidding, I brought clothes this time.” Makoto jokes, just tucking his head into Haruka’s hair for a moment. “I know you like that shirt.” He’s about to bother Haruka for a small kiss when the elevator doors slide open.

Haruka leads Makoto out into the hallway, taking a right to get to his apartment by the end. Hands still clasped together, Haruka feels selfish for yanking Makoto to his place again, but it’s not that the other boy’s complaining anyway. Haruka didn’t even have to *ask* Makoto to come over after dinner; he just quietly got on the same train as Haruka and the rest of the evening was set from there.

They reach Haruka’s apartment and find a red envelope taped onto the front door.

“What’s that?” Makoto asks. Haruka shrugs, loosens his hand from Makoto’s, and tears the envelope down from over the peephole, ripping open the paper haphazardly. There’s a small, folded note on the inside, written on a ripped-out piece of graph paper.

“Did you write this?” Haruka asks, unfolding the paper to find a handwriting he’s not familiar with.

Makoto shakes his head. “No, I didn’t. Is this...*a love letter*?”

“Read it out loud.” Haruka says.

“*Nanase-senpai...*” Makoto leans over Haruka’s shoulder to read. “I know you have already given me your answer, but please reconsider. I would...” Makoto’s voice drops for the last part. “Very much like to be with you. Regards...Inoue Shou.” Makoto looks to Haruka. “Who’s that?”

Haruka shrugs again. “Not sure. Might be the guy who confessed to me yesterday.”

“What?! *That* happened?” Makoto asks.

“Don’t be jealous.” Haruka teases.

“I’m...I’m not jealous. I just didn’t know.” Makoto stammers.

Down the hallway, Haruka can hear a door creak open and close the instant he turns to look. Makoto looks positively terrified, like he’s walked into the opening scene of a ghost-themed horror movie. He hands Haruka the ripped red envelope, shuffling behind Haruka as he scans the empty hallway. It doesn’t help that the shoddy electricity wiring is acting up again, resulting in flickering lights at various points in the vicinity.

“Can...we go inside already?” Makoto asks. “This is freaking me out.” Haruka just sighs and stuffs the envelope into his pocket, taking out his house keys and throwing them over to Makoto.

“I’ll be in soon.” Haruka says, walking down the hallway. “I need to speak with a neighbor.”

“Haru!” Makoto calls.

“Go in first.” Haruka says simply. He doesn’t hear anything else from Makoto, hearing the door shut behind him. Haruka walks right back down the hall, reaching the apartment numbered 805 with the name plate *Inoue* right on the front door. With a giant sigh, honestly too tired for this, he knocks and waits for an answer.

After about thirty seconds or so, the door opens to a small creak. The boy that confessed to Haruka yesterday peaks his face through the door from the darkness in his own apartment unit.

Haruka sighs. “So you live here.”

The other boy comes into fuller view, opening his front door a tad more. “Yeah. I explained that to you yesterday. Weren’t you listening?”

“Guess not.” Haruka admits. He takes the letter out from his pocket. “Take this back.”

"You...don't want it?"

"No." Haruka says. "I really don't feel the same. I can't accept this." He pushes the paper back into the other boys hands.

"So, there's really another guy?"

Haruka doesn't answer.

"I saw you two holding hands. He's tall and handsome...not like me." He looks positively miserable.

"It has nothing to do with you." Haruka says. It *really* doesn't. A beat of silence comes over the both of them.

"So you're really with him, then?"

Haruka looks the featureless boy in the eye and nods. "I...am." He says quietly, with a soft smile before biting his bottom lip and suppressing it.

Again, Haruka finds himself uttering these affirmations, short but sure. It's his way of shouting out into the world.

"And you love him?"

Haruka doesn't answer at first, holding his breath like he's suddenly been thrown underwater. *Love*. Haruka wishes other people wouldn't use that word around him. He blushes a little bit at the sound of the word, because he knows this infatuated high school boy is talking about Makoto. There's no one else it could be. He just wishes that he'd use another word besides *love*, though. He knows nothing about Haruka's feelings.

Love is such a cheap word when it comes from someone that doesn't matter.

"I do." He finally says, short on breath. "I...do."

But all in all, despite the simplicity of this all-encompassing word, it's what Haruka feels.

And with that sudden spark of adrenaline, Haruka just leaves Inoue Shou with a short wave and nothing else. He knows how he feels about Makoto, and he suspects it's a feeling he had about him for the longest time, just buried under the thin-veiled surface. Why couldn't he say it before, after more than a decade in Iwatobi, after nearly a year alone with him in Tokyo? He's lightheaded as he marches back down the hall, with each step feeling like a marathon, mouthing '*Makoto*' and affixing sweet nothings to his name. He tries about five or six different things, from '*I like you*' to '*I want to be with you*,' but none of them sound quite right. All he knows is that he has to *say* something, anything, to him. He's already told four people in Tokyo, which seems like *millions* to Haruka when he thinks about it: Makoto has to be the one to know next.

I love you, I love you, I love you, the phrase repeats over and over in Haruka's head.

With his hand on the doorknob, Haruka pushes his way back into his apartment and finds Makoto sitting on the floor by the table, tapping his lead pencil against the corner of his hardcover textbook. He doesn't really seem like he's concentrated on reading though, with his eyes glazed over in some other realm of thought. He instantly snaps his attention to Haruka, who just takes a seat next to him. Haruka huddles his knees up to his chest as he scoots closer to Makoto, masking his stifled breaths under the guise of an exasperated sigh.

"I returned the letter." Haruka says to Makoto simply.

Makoto laughs nervously as he puts his pencil down and closes his book. "I thought I lost you there for a second."

"So you *were* jealous." Haruka tries to joke, taking some of the pressure off of himself.

Makoto just buries his mouth with the side of his arm, trying to disguise his embarrassment in futility. "A little." He admits.

"But...I knew you'd come back." He adds after a bit of silence. Haruka just wraps his own shaking hand over Makoto's wrist, tearing his arm down from covering his lips.

"Makoto...I..." Haruka starts, feeling the next word prepare itself for deployment. It's time. He's about to breathe out the next words, *anything* to show how much he just wants Makoto, how much he wants the two of them to be together, but they never come. He just looks at Makoto, the other boy waiting in a mix of anxiety and lingering bashfulness.

"Kiss me." Haruka says. It's a disappointing result, knowing that there are other things he should be saying, but Makoto doesn't seem too fazed by the command. He's the one to initiate their first kiss of the evening, smiling as he dives towards Haruka's face with one hand on his cheek. Makoto takes his other hand into Haruka's and keeps their foreheads touching when he breaks away from his lips for a quick breath. Makoto can't stop smiling, and he's letting a few breathy laughs escape his system every once in a while.

"I...well..." Makoto's struggling with his words.

"Hm?" Haruka asks, dizzy half from his own disappointments, and half from the fact he gets to kiss Makoto again today.

"I love you, Haru."

Haruka just watches Makoto shut his eyes closed like he's just made a terrible mistake, but his shoulders begin to sink in relief and he soon he's smiling again and facing Haruka with lowered, doting eyes. Haruka is surprised at the words, that Makoto would be the first to say it despite his shaking nervousness, and now he feels he should say it back. But Haruka can't find it in himself to say anything. Nothing at all. Tonight is *not* that night, and he will not force anything.

Haruka's just not ready to put it into words.

But he wonders *when* that time will finally come. He can't have Makoto wait forever.

In response to his *I love you*, Haruka just holds his hands to Makoto's face and kisses him further, placing so much of his weight against him that they end up together on the floor. Makoto just wraps his arms around Haruka's waist and accepts him wholeheartedly.

One more thing crosses Haruka's mind before he gets completely carried away in Makoto's warmth for the night, and it's a different question from the others:

'Why can't being in love be simpler?'

Chapter End Notes

Good evening friends! Here's the newest chapter. It runs on the long side, I think, because I'm just so into writing cuddly morning MakoHaru scenes...again, I've brought in these inconsequential OCs for the chapters to show there are other people in Haruka's life too, except that I try not to give them too much flavor. (After all, this is a MH fic, so their relationship will always be front and center.)

I think the fact that Haruka's starting to let little things slip about Makoto is a sign that he's getting closer to really verbalizing things with his best friend, but he's just not quite there yet. He loves Makoto, no doubt about that, but sometimes it's the hardest to say to one person who should hear it... (well, that's my take on things for this particular fic.) I'm also aware some people never really do verbalize their feelings sometimes, and it's not needed, but a little affirmation is nice from time to time, right? (I'm also playing on that whole idea of the 'what are we?' conversation a lot of people get to as a relationship crossroads, and I'd like to think Haruka's kinda taking a pitstop here instead of outright avoiding the question...)

And there's just a crazy amount of kissing in this chapter, but that's okay. I think once you start kissing a new person, you really don't want to stop...it's a terrible, terrible craving...so I guess I'm unapologetic about all the kissing, ha ha.

Let's see...what did I do for music this time around? (I'm sorry, this is always something I'll include.) I jammed a lot to "At Home" by Crystal Fighters, "Slow and Steady" by Of Monsters and Men, "Chemical Reaction" by Sucre, and "Look After You" by The Fray. Yay for useless bits of info!

And I predict maybe two chapters or three to go, both of them on the semi-long side!

little games

Chapter Summary

These are the little games Haruka and Makoto play when they don't think the other's paying attention.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

¥12460

Haruka isn't lying when he says he'll kiss all of the beauty marks on Makoto's body.

One. The first one Haruka finds is at the base of Makoto's neck, right above the left side of his collarbone. It's tiny, barely larger than a needle's prick, but Haruka manages to brush his lips against it with a kiss he thinks is covert. Makoto's sincerely trying to study at the table, for a test on *the advanced prevention and care of athletic injuries*, and from the conflicted frown on his face it seems he's not sure whether or not to tell Haruka to stop.

"Just that one." Haruka says in a whisper, so Makoto doesn't have to make the difficult decision of saying '*no, not right now.*'

Makoto just laughs a little as he pushes his glasses back up his face. He has a fairly large exam tomorrow, and it'd be wrong of Haruka to distract him too much, no matter how much he really wants to kiss Makoto. He can find all of his beauty marks later.

Haruka gets from from his spot next to him, going over to the window to let some air into his stuffy little apartment. The last peek of sun on the horizon has left the sky in pink and orange hues, and the air smells a little fresher than it should during a summer in Tokyo. Haruka sits down and lays his head on the window sill for a moment, contemplating just falling asleep right then and there. He likes peaceful little afternoons like this, where it's like he can almost feel home on his skin. Closing his eyes, he pretends he's dozing at the table in his living room in Iwatobi, with the back doors open wide and Makoto sitting by the grass.

"Haru." Makoto calls after Haruka.

"Mm?" Haruka groans, snapping back into reality.

"You should keep packing. It's easy to forget things." Makoto says.

"I'll pack later." Haruka yawns.

"Your flight is at *six* in the morning." Makoto sighs.

"I've still got time."

"Oh, you *say* that."

Haruka raises his head from the window sill before laying it back down. He's not really looking forward to spending the next five days at a training camp with a bunch of high-strung coaches and teammates that are *still* calling him *mystery boy*, but he has to admit that he misses the idea of going back to the coast he knows. Haruka's university has rented out the same island facilities Samezuka used two years ago for their training festivities, which means he'll be close enough to Iwatobi, too. It feels wrong though, going back home without Makoto.

"I'm stopping at Iwatobi." Haruka says simply, looking over his shoulder. "Nagisa begged when I told him I'd be close."

Makoto nods. "You mentioned that before." He laughs a little, with a slight tilt of his head towards Haruka. "Say hi to everyone for me."

"I will."

Haruka wants to say '*come with me*' or '*let's go together*' but those words still show no sign of coming out. It's been almost two weeks since he's gotten with Makoto, and he knows he should be a little more patient about things like simple, honest communication, but he's tired of the words that die upon leaving his lips. It shouldn't be so difficult if it's Makoto.

"You should go too." Haruka finally manages to say, but the words are all wrong.

"With you?" Makoto smiles.

'*Yes, with me.*' Haruka just nods without saying a thing. Of course Makoto would come up with the missing words.

Makoto just puts his pencil down and sighs dreamily. "I'd like that. Too bad about this exam, though...and it's not like I can afford another plane ticket right now." He lets out another heavy huff of breath, looking towards the dusk. Haruka notices he's been full of those little sighs lately, even when they're not kissing or in each other's faces.

Haruka thinks that while he's staring out the window Makoto's remembering all those same hometown sunsets, pink and hazy. It's then where Haruka comes to the conclusion that his best friend is probably homesick. He gets up from his place at the window sill, goes over to Makoto, and lays down another kiss, a quiet apology for the extra twelve thousand, four-hundred and sixty yen he doesn't have to get Makoto back to Iwatobi.

"Thank you." Makoto just kisses Haruka back. "I'll go back with you soon."

Haruka just nods, flashing the smallest of smiles. Makoto scoops him up in a hug, and it's in the corner of his eye where Haruka can spot the tiniest beauty mark right at the edge of his best friend's cheek.

Two. Haruka holds Makoto's face and places the kiss. Once Haruka comes back, he's sure he'll finish playing his little game.

seven-hundred and twenty-seven

Haruka takes a picture of the white cat Makoto used to take care of on the stony steps, attaching the photo to the text message he's about to send.

I found him. Haruka texts, before pressing the delete button for what feels like the millionth time in a span of an hour. Makoto had told Haruka to enjoy himself in his only day at Iwatobi before going off to camp, but so far all he's done is snap pictures of all the stray cats Makoto might know.

He's big now. He types out as the cat runs away to chase a scuttling bug. Haruka just sighs when that doesn't seem right, either, and deletes the message again. He really isn't meant for things like texting. People always say that it's easier to speak through text messages because there's no actual talking involved, but Haruka knows better than that: words are still words, and he just doesn't have the right ones for Makoto. It doesn't matter if it's written or said.

"Hey! Haru-chan! What are you doing?" Nagisa calls from the bottom of the stairs. Rei's waiting with him too.

Haruka just hides his phone back in his pocket but Nagisa's already caught the sight. He gives Haruka a comically sly smile and a little sneer.

"Aw, are you getting *sentimental* on me, Haru-chan?" Nagisa asks. "I saw that cat picture..."

"It's nothing." Haruka says abruptly, looking away in slight embarrassment.

"Don't go taunting Haruka-senpai now," Rei says. "He's come a long way! Leave him in peace."

A long way. It's seven-hundred and twenty-seven kilometers, to be exact, but Haruka's not bothered by the distance he's travelled. He just thinks that Makoto should be here as well, exactly seven-hundred and twenty-seven kilometers away from Tokyo, at home on the stony steps with the three of them. He enjoys being Rei and Nagisa, they *are* two of his closest friends after all, but there's an empty space between the three of them that can only be filled by Makoto.

"All right, no need to scold me!" Nagisa argues back. "What do you wanna do then, huh, Haru-chan? We have to do something fun."

"Swimming." Haruka suggests.

"*What?* But...aren't you swimming tomorrow, too? And the day after that?" Nagisa asks. "What about the arcade? Or we can cook something *exciting*."

"What's your definition of *exciting*?" Rei asks, looking honestly afraid.

"Soufflé." Nagisa whispers dramatically like they're about to take one out of the oven in that instant.

"No, I'm not *baking* anything." Rei argues. "Too messy."

"Well Mako-chan said--"

"Makoto-senpai's not here!" Rei quickly corrects him.

"I want to swim." Haruka says again, suddenly remembering something else he could take a picture of. He's been meaning to visit his old high school again, anyway. Maybe he'll take a picture of the pool for Makoto instead of a bunch of stray cats he may or may not know.

"Haruka-senpai, things never change for you, huh?" Rei just sighs with a smile.

"Hm."

Haruka thinks about that question, but he knows that's no where near true. He may still be swimming and taking long baths and eating mackerel, but Rei and Nagisa don't know about the kisses he places on Makoto in secret, or the way he takes Makoto's hand as they're walking down the hall, or how they cling onto each other at night. Most people from Iwatobi would assume the two boys were still together in Tokyo, but *together*? Even Haruka is still struggling with that word.

Together. He might not understand it completely, but somehow it sounds just right.

As Nagisa and Rei dart back down the stairs in an impromptu race to the corner, Haruka slowly begins to follow with ambling steps. He takes his phone out of his pocket, looking back at the cat photo he meant to send to Makoto earlier. Sending this to him just seems so *gimmicky* now, like he even needs an excuse to talk to Makoto. Deleting the picture completely, he just goes back to Makoto's chat window and types the following words:

I love you.

'No, not yet.' It's not the time for that. He's not going to make his first *I love you* come from a text message of all things. Makoto deserves better than that.

I love y|

I lo|

I miss you.

"Hey, stop playing on your phone, Haru-chan!" Nagisa yells from down the block.

"Coming." Haruka calls after the two of them. Before he's about to put his phone away again, he feels his device vibrate in his hand. There's a little blinking envelope next to Makoto's name.

I'll be with you again soon, the message reads.

6, 10, 16

"Hey, Haru-chan. What are you doing for your birthday?" Nagisa asks.

"My birthday?"

"It's in six days, isn't it?" Rei chimes in as the three of them are walking home from the pool.

Predictably, Haruka is the one closest to the coastline, the sun completely gone from the horizon, and all that's left is the deep hue of purple in the sky. He's got water in one of his ears, so some of the things Rei and Nagisa say get muffled and lost to the void unless either one of them really speak up. This doesn't really inspire him to pay attention, but Nagisa and Rei don't seem to mind because they're busy whispering to each other about something. Drifting off in his own thoughts, Haruka decides he'll just doze off in the tub and eventually find his way back to his bed a little later in the night. Nevermind about his birthday.

Haruka is so dazed with a day's worth of fatigue that he doesn't even really question why Rei and Nagisa are coming home with him. He usually only takes this particular walk with Makoto, on this particular block along the sea, but this is something the two of them haven't done for a long time anyway.

"So, nothing planned, huh?" Nagisa asks.

Haruka shrugs. "I don't think so." His parents will probably call, his teammates might surprise him by pushing him into the pool, and Makoto...*well*, he's not quite sure what Makoto would have planned, but all he knows is that his best friend never forgets. Haruka just thinks of all of those little birthdays, ones he admits he took for granted sometimes, and how Makoto always remembered all of them.

'Happy birthday!' Makoto said at the age of six, when they were playing in the park that morning. He had made Haruka a crown of weeds, and insisted they were *flowers*.

'Happy birthday!' Makoto said at the age of ten, right before swim practice at the local club. He gave Haruka a pair of goggles that year, the nicest he had ever seen up until that point. Later Makoto's mother would confess that Makoto had saved all of his extra pocket money to get Haruka that particular present, and that she thought it was *just so cute* of his son.

'Happy birthday!' Makoto said at the age of sixteen, when he showed up to Haruka's house early in the morning to drop off this poorly-wrapped lump of a thing before school. Unwrapping the unidentified object, Haruka found that Makoto had given him a fish-shaped body pillow. Makoto *insisted* it was a mackerel.

'Happy birthday!' This is the first year he'll be looking forward to his birthday. Just a bit selfishly, he wonders what Makoto has planned and--

"Happy birthday, Haru."

Haruka looks over his shoulder, knowing that voice anywhere whether it's Tokyo or Iwatobi. Makoto just gives a pleasant little wave and Haruka goes up to him wordlessly, taking one of his hands before realizing Nagisa and Rei can see. He loosens his grip a little bit before Makoto keeps a hold on him.

"Ah...it's okay." Makoto says. "It was their idea."

"What?" Haruka asks.

Rei sighs. "We didn't know what to get for your birthday, and we were running out of time before you got here, so we figured we'd just buy Makoto-senpai a plane ticket to Iwatobi." He clears his throat, pushing his glasses up his face. "It doesn't seem right that one of you would be back here without the other, right?"

"*Haru-chan and Mako-chan.*" Nagisa teases. "Always together."

"Do you like it, Haruka-senpai?" Rei asks.

"*It?*" Makoto asks. "I'm not a pair of socks."

"Him. Do you like *him*, Haru-chan?" Nagisa asks with a clever little smile.

That's not even a question.

"Both of you turn around." Haruka says, showing a hint of a smile at the both of them. Nagisa just links arms with Rei and snickers a bit, turning away and walking down the pavement.

Haruka may only have an evening here with Makoto, but at least they're here in Iwatobi. He raises himself by heels just a bit and kisses his best friend, a silent thank you for coming all this way, back to the coast they both know.

"I'm here." Makoto whispers with a sweet smile.

And Haruka thinks, in response to Nagisa's question, '*Why yes, I do like him very much.*'

Chapter End Notes

I was going to write a full-on smut chapter this time around, just to show the progression of their sexuality and all that jazz, but I wasn't feeling it and decided to go with the other thing swirling around in my head. This chapter is pure, tooth-rotting, cavity-inducing FLUFF, and I'm completely unapologetic about it. Everyday I keep reading new interviews about freakin' MakoHaru in Tokyo and it just makes me want to fly to the moon and never come back. So this is the result of it!

(I swear Haruka's close to saying "I love you" though. Again, RIP me for liking slow burns and this type of pacing)

(Also it's just really hard to get into writing smut on the subway. Never again lmao)

OKAY, so since I'm sick I'll keep this after-note short. I based all plane fares and distances on the town of Iwami, where Iwatobi is based off in real life! Just for reference.

And music wise? "At Home" by Crystal Fighters, "Adore You" by Miley Cyrus (i just really like this song sue me) "400 Lux" by Lorde, and "The Struggle" by Grizfolk. They're not necessarily MakoHaru related but idk it lends well to the tones I'm always trying to establish with this fic. (I did make a sultry MH playlist for smut-writing though...hmmmmm...)

ANYWAY, till next time!

to touch

Chapter Summary

Haruka may not be good with his *I love you's* and other sweet nothings, but Makoto's nervous about the touch.

Or, an exploration in sensuality and the feel of foreign skin.

Chapter Notes

Light smut ahead!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

eight

“So...you want to spend our one night in Iwatobi doing *this*?”

“Yup.”

As therapeutic as some people find solving jigsaw puzzles or arranging flowers, Haruka finds pleasure in spotting Makoto's wayward freckles. He had already promised himself he'd kiss all of them, but Haruka doesn't realize how many are actually hiding away on Makoto's skin. As soon Haruka lays back down to examine the expanse that is Makoto's back (it's almost like a beach full of dunes, really, with all of his definition) he realizes he has a huge task ahead of him.

"Mm, try not to tickle me too much," Makoto says, rubbing a towel against his head to dry his hair. "I'm writing here." He's just gotten out of the shower, trying to do his class readings undistracted, but Haruka can't help but hover closer to smell the aroma of fresh mint soap on his pinkened skin. He tugs at the fabric of Makoto's loose t-shirt, lifting it up periodically to resume his searching, and wishes he could just take it off of him altogether.

Haruka spots another brown beauty mark the size of a dulled-pencil point, right in the center where Makoto's shoulder blades meet. Laying down a *barely-there* kiss, Haruka counts how many he's tracked down so far. He thinks it's about eight at this point, and he hasn't even covered a majority of Makoto's body yet.

"One day...I'm going to do the same to you, you know." Makoto says.

Haruka just smiles a little bit. "I don't think so."

"Why not?" Makoto looks over his shoulder with a little frown.

"You'd be too embarrassed to kiss me in some places."

"N-no...ah...well..." Makoto tries to argue with Haruka. "I think I could...*kiss* you in new— wait, no, I'm trying to concentrate! Don't do this to me!"

With Makoto's insistence, Haruka just goes back on his little adventure, innocently tracing his index finger along the ridges of Makoto's back.

"Mm." Haruka scoffs a little.

"*What?*"

"Now you've got me thinking."

"I'm not sure I even want to know."

"But you do." Haruka says plainly.

"Well...when you're talking about *new places*, how can I not?" Makoto sighs while snapping his book shut, conceding the fact that he was never going to get this reading done, anyway. He flips over and faces Haruka, their heads knocking together when they both try to dive in for a kiss. Makoto just laughs and kisses Haruka on the forehead anyway, waiting for Haruka to say what he wanted to say.

"Well." Haruka says. "Kissing is fine."

Makoto's face goes red. "I...think so, too." From the look on his face, he has some idea of where this conversation is going. He has on one of those faces where he can't decide whether or not he's cringing or smiling, so it rests at this awkward in-between.

"But...there's more." He scoots closer to Makoto, looking up at him with blinking eyes. "...to try." Makoto just swallows and stares right back at him, biting down on his bottom lip and offering a queasy smile.

"I mean...it'd be *nice*...to do those sorts of things. And here...in Iwatobi." Makoto answers. "But you *do* have early practice tomorrow."

Haruka tittle his head and presses his cheek into the fabric of Makoto's shirt. "So...no?"

"Not...*no*."

"Then?"

"Hm." Makoto puts an arm around Haruka and squeezes him closer. "When we get back to Tokyo? When we have more time...to explore." He whispers. Makoto sounds unsure about his answer, but Haruka takes it anyway. Of course this is Makoto *easing into things* again,

and Haruka doesn't blame him. They've been the same for so long, just side by side without actually ever *mixing* in the way Haruka's thinking of, so there's bound to be adjustments here and there.

Haruka sighs a little bit, inching himself up on the bed so he can rest in the nape of Makoto's neck. It's one of Haruka's favorite spots on his whole body, just because his head fits perfectly in the empty space, and he's content with lying there even if they can't go any further tonight.

"You should go back to reading." Haruka says, suddenly drowsy.

"Maybe. I might just fall asleep too, though." Makoto yawns. "No more counting moles for you?"

Haruka shakes his head. "Done."

"Hm." Makoto breathes out as he nods his head closer to Haruka's.

"Mm?"

"Now you've got *me* thinking."

"About?"

"What I want to do on your *one* night here."

Haruka sighs because Makoto is so predictable sometimes. "Kiss me?"

"Kiss you." Makoto says with a laugh, holding Haruka's face and bringing their lips together. Haruka reciprocates without too much trouble. He notices their legs intertwining as they come closer together, with a great mass of heat coming from Makoto's lower torso as they press into each other. Haruka just wraps his arms around Makoto's back, digging his fingers into the cotton of Makoto's t-shirt. Haruka feels more fevered than usual kissing him, each breath just a little bit more strained than the last, and he knows it's not from the lingering shower steam still drifting in the air.

With a light hand on Makoto's cheek, Haruka knows that he feels the fever, too. Even if he's a bit more *unpresuming* about things, there is no doubt Makoto feels the same. He's just too polite to say it right now.

"*Haru*," Makoto breathes the name right back into Haruka's mouth.

Haruka's too occupied to say '*Makoto*' back. He's had his wet dreams about Makoto before, he's pictured what being with him would actually *be* like, but these are no substitutes for actually getting under Makoto's skin. With another kiss and closed eyes, Haruka tries to put these thoughts away into the shadowy corners of his mind, but the urge always manages to escape to the forefront.

He just really wants Makoto.

And Haruka has never felt more excited about going to back to Tokyo.

2:09:14

It's a little past two in the morning when Haruka comes back to the hotel room after a walk alone on the island coast. The other first years on the swimming team have taken it upon themselves to huddle around Haruka's bed for some strange reason, undaunted by the fact that all of them have training starting at *sunrise*, and that they all should *at least* have the slightest notion of going to bed soon. Haruka is about to sleep in the bathtub, if he has to (and he had intended to soak for at least for an hour in there, anyway) before one of his teammates call him over.

"Hey, *love bite boy*, come here! Look at what we found under your mattress."

Haruka just pokes at the hickey on his neck to check if it's still there. Unfortunately, because *it is still very much there*, Haruka zips up his track jacket all the way up to the bottom of his chin to hide it, too tired for any further shenanigans.

Love bite boy. The captain of the university swim team is the one who penned the name, right after seeing the splotchy bruise at the base of Haruka's neck during swim practice. Haruka just thinks how much worse this new nickname is, and how gladly he would gladly go back to the days when he was so *mildly* called mystery boy.

Still, he's not going to tell Makoto about his new nickname, because out of mortification Makoto will probably never even *touch* his neck again.

"Hey, come on, Nanase! Come look."

Haruka just sighs a bit and goes over, and finds that the other boys are huddled over a porno magazine. With a flash of skin and what looks like a skimpy bikini, he's sure of it.

"Ah, to think people still use *magazines*. Isn't that what the internet's for now?"

"There's just something about having a physical copy, though..."

"Or, you know, *the real thing*."

"It's all very good, in my opinion. Whatever works."

"Is this *yours*, love bite boy?"

Haruka just gives a curt shake of his head. "No."

"He doesn't need any of that. He has someone, remember? It's probably from the high school that came before us...uh, what was it? *Samezuka*?"

"Figures. They're a bunch of wild guys."

Haruka wants to hear no more and decides to lock himself in the bathroom. He'd go back to the pool if he could, but he wants all the solitude he can get and he doesn't want to take any chances on any late night swimmers coming in. He peels off his jacket, briefly examining the purple hickey on his neck, and sighs. He lets the water run in the tub and throws the rest of his clothes off, starting with his socks, his jeans, and then his jammers. The last thing to go is the red flannel shirt Makoto let him keep for training camp, but Haruka feels bad for just discarding it with all the other clothes on the floor. He folds it neatly and places it on the counter, making a mental note to find a washer for it later.

Tracing the hickey once more with the light press of his index finger, he makes another mental note: *tell Makoto not to suck so hard*. As he gets into the tub, he tries to guess *when* it even happened. Haruka thinks it must have been when he was already half-asleep, letting Makoto kiss him however he wanted under the blankets. He closes his eyes as he leans his head back against the porcelain of the tub and decides he might just actually fall asleep.

And then his mind lingers. He imagines what it'd be like if Makoto bit down on Haruka in other places. The imagined foray doesn't start off too far from the neck at first; Haruka sees Makoto kissing one of his shoulders, his collarbones. Then, with a grasp of Haruka's arms he'd push him down on the bed and dig his face into Haruka's chest, admiring every inch of his skin. He'd say something offhandedly like, *"I still smell chlorine on you,"* before inching downward on Haruka's body, kissing his lower abdomen and nudging dangerously close to his crotch.

Haruka sighs heavily and peeks down at the water. He's feeling himself get hard thinking about these imaginary hickeys.

'Great.' He wasn't planning on getting aroused at camp.

Reaching for his phone, which is still on the ground in his pants pocket, he texts Makoto the following:

It's all your fault.

Haruka's just finding a whole bunch of things to blame on Makoto tonight.

1,000,000

“Welcome home.” Makoto whispers for the millionth time in one evening.

Haruka thinks it's unfair, the way Makoto says those words. *Welcome home*, with his voice that sounds like home itself. Haruka just glides his hands over Makoto's shoulders, pressing his fingers lightly over the edge of his collarbones and dragging them down to his chest. Hovering ever closer to his best friend, Haruka kisses Makoto lightly, breathing out his response as he separates for air.

They're sitting in Haruka's bed together, legs crossed and leaning into each other with breathy kisses. Lately it always seems that they're meeting like this at dusk, with the pinkness of the setting sun, but Haruka never minds, because it just lends to what they are—just a little bit drowsy, just a little bit slow, but completely and wholeheartedly tender.

“You should unpack.” Makoto says. “I’m distracting you.” He’s right, but Haruka doesn’t mind the mess for now, or the diversion. He had just gotten home from training camp when Makoto came ringing at the door, and soon after that folding a bunch of jammers became the last thing on his mind.

“Help me *after*.” Haruka lunges at Makoto with arms open, wrapping them around his shoulders and putting all of his weight on him. The both of them fall back on the bed, with Makoto’s head pressed against the pillows and Haruka straddled on top. Haruka leans over him and kisses Makoto once more before looking down at his face, which is an amusing mix of embarrassed and eager. He has this incredulous smile on his face, like he can never quite believe that Haruka is so *feisty* in these sorts of situations. Soon though, Makoto’s own eyes lower in a sort of strange determination, and he takes Haruka by surprise by flipping him over onto the sheets.

‘Less timid?’ Haruka speculates as Makoto digs into him with panting kisses.

Makoto travels down to Haruka’s neck, where he’ll *surely* leave an awkward amount of hickeys, but Haruka’s getting much too faint to care. He closes his eyes as Makoto really *rubs* under Haruka’s shirt for the first time. Makoto doesn’t seem to realize he’s doing it, but once he does, he recoils his hand from the touch of Haruka’s skin.

“Ah, sorry.” Makoto apologizes, looking away from Haruka. “I didn’t mean to—“

Haruka frowns slightly up at him. “Don’t be sorry.” Pulling off his own shirt over his head, Haruka lies back down and pushes his chest out to Makoto, his breathing still heavy and pained from the heat building up all over his body.

He digs the side of his head into the pillow, still finding Makoto’s gaze. “You said...you wanted to *touch* me, right?”

Makoto’s mouth goes agape with a loss of words, and he smacks his lips together in response. But Makoto doesn’t seem to realize that he’s doing that either, because when he realizes, he just shuts his mouth closed altogether.

"When did I say that?" Makoto asks in a panic.

"Our first morning together."

"I don't remember saying this!"

“You don’t?” Haruka asks bluntly, turning his head back to face Makoto full on again.

“Well...okay...I do.” Makoto admits. “I’m just...I don’t know...*nervous* about that.”

Haruka smiles at him. “Ah.”

His eyes linger down to Makoto's crotch, where he sees the curve of a forming erection in his jeans. Haruka thinks of the one that's building under the fabric of his own sweatpants, and how he'd like Makoto to do something about it this once. It's almost too obvious that Makoto would like to go further too, past kissing and touching over the clothes, but this is, well, *Makoto*. It's just like him to be modest about the whole idea of *going further*, and it seems he's too painfully embarrassed to voice his concerns.

So, since Haruka can't say the words he'd like, since he can't deliver his '*I like you's*' and '*I love you's*' with ease, he knows he has to speak up in other ways.

"Makoto." Haruka slips his hand into Makoto's palm, his fingers finding the empty spaces to rest in. In a bizarre way, handholding in this instant reminds him of their childhood. The memories are nothing but hazy, half-erased sketches by now, but the sensation of guiding Makoto through the new and the unknown is still all too familiar. He had held Makoto's hand through the old fisherman's funeral procession, through the first day of elementary school. He had held Makoto's hand in the locker room of their old swim club, right before making their introductions to the rest of the children. He had held Makoto's hand when his parents told him they were having twins. Haruka had held Makoto's hands lots of times, he realizes, *through all their firsts*, and this is no different.

Haruka knows exactly what to do. *Just hold Makoto's hand.*

Makoto will find his way from there.

"Touch me." Haruka says softly, with stifled breath.

Makoto's face crumbles into complete helplessness, his mouth slightly open for all the rapid breaths that escape his system, his eyes lowered in a struggle to really apprehend what Haruka *can really do to him*. He concedes defeat, ignoring all of his nervous resolve, and leans in towards Haruka; slowly, cautiously, he inches towards him, before engulfing Haruka completely with a series of deep kisses. Haruka wraps an arm around Makoto's upper back and hitches his body upward into his, helping Makoto along with getting their bodies closer.

"Haru..." Makoto whispers into Haruka's ear. Makoto's body feels like a space heater against his, but this the type of heat that makes Haruka's body radiate all kinds of contradictions. An uncomfortable shiver emerges from the base of Haruka's spine, and he can only lie back down on the mattress to mediate his wooziness.

"*Closer.*" Haruka urges. He doesn't want to have to say *please*.

Makoto's free hand starts a new expedition on Haruka's body, grazing the goosebumps on Haruka's stomach before finding settlement on the edges of his hipbones. Makoto lets go of Haruka's hand, and it's the type of *letting go* Haruka is okay with, *as long as it's this*, as long as Makoto's exploring new places he can grasp onto later. Makoto stops kissing Haruka on the lips, his mouth travelling down the nape of his neck and down his chest, where he remains to suck softly on his skin. Haruka just exhales another heavy, shivering sigh, half-alive at all of these new developments.

"I won't be able to control myself." Makoto admits with a shake his head and with his nose still buried in the cleavage of Haruka's chest. Makoto's hands, big and firm and warm, are gripped on Haruka's hips, where he's slowly—and probably subconsciously—pulling down on the elastic of Haruka's pants. Haruka can't help but sigh about all of this, because despite how nervous Makoto is touching Haruka, his actions just keep telling a different story.

He's just as hungry as he is.

"*Don't.*" Haruka says simply, as he places his hands over Makoto's. He takes them off of his hips and hooks Makoto's fingers onto the elastic of his sweatpants, taking his wrists and tugging at the fabric for him. Makoto lifts his head from Haruka's chest with eyes absolutely wide.

"H-Haru..."

"It's fine." Haruka says with a quick huff of breath. When Makoto nods hesitantly, pulling down Haruka's down pants on his own, taking his underwear with him, he lets go of Makoto's hands. Makoto, as big and towering as his frame is, still looks so shy and hopeless about watching all of this unfold, but that's what Haruka finds endearing. As Makoto shimmies off the rest of Haruka's bottoms, disappearing fabric unveiling his most intimate parts, leaving him completely exposed—*naked*—to his best friend, Haruka just waits for Makoto's next reaction.

Haruka can feel his own temple beat furiously against his skull, and he can't deny that *he's* nervous too, but he can calm down if Makoto's with him. With Makoto, these sorts of things are all right.

"It's okay," Haruka says again, taking his hand. "It's okay to look."

Makoto comes around with a few shy glances, before Haruka tugs at his wrist and gets him to look him right in the eye. Makoto finally lets himself stare at Haruka from head to toe in the hazy sunlight, and slowly he places his hands on the areas they've have yearned to touch—sliding fingers up Haruka's leg and to his thigh, the other hand creeping back up to Haruka's hip—and with one, shuddering sigh it seems he's finally relaxed. He smiles like he's about to cry, and he just shakes his head over *what Haruka can really do to him*.

"I just..." Makoto sighs. "I just really love you, Haru."

It is with Makoto's declaration where Haruka realizes he's the one getting flustered. He buries his face behind raised arms and almost curses the heavens for having someone like Makoto, for having someone so seemingly *nervous* and *clumsy* but so clear in his affirmations. Makoto just laughs, leaning down to kiss Haruka on the forehead.

"It's okay." Makoto says with a whisper, still close to him. "Whenever you're ready."

He really does want to say it. *I love you.* It should be easier than this.

"It really is okay, Haru."

Haruka lowers his arms away from his face with those words, feeling just a splash of relief when he sees that Makoto's smiling at him, completely unbothered, if not just a bit frazzled. Haruka forgets they're still *both* easing into things in their own ways, and there's absolutely nothing wrong with that. With another heavy heave of breath, Haruka tells himself to keep going.

"I want to look at you, too." Haruka finally says. It's not fair that he should be the only one naked anyway.

"Y-yeah?" Makoto nods a bit, returning to that familiar embarrassed form. He takes off his shirt first when Haruka begins to tug at it. Makoto hovers his hands over his pants before backing down, but it's predictable he'd would be flustered about this. It's one thing to be topless, a rather normal occurrence for two swimmers, but *naked*? Haruka can read just about everything on Makoto's mind in that second, because he's just so obvious about it. '*Will Haru really want to see me naked?*' he's thinking, and of course the answer, for Haru, is *yes*.

"I'll help."

Haruka knows Makoto's body anywhere, and he's memorized each line where his muscles start and end. Haruka reaches out to him, weakly from his place on the sheets, just desperate for the touch. His fingers graze the firmness of Makoto's lower abdomen and trace over the cut streaks of his hipbone, all of his body just inviting Haruka to undress the rest of him. He sits up and lingers on the button of Makoto's jeans, circling over his strong erection with a curious index finger. Makoto just breathes heavily at Haruka's light touch, right to the point where he just resolves to take his pants off altogether. '*I can't take all these teasing,*' he's probably thinking, and this just brings a sly smile to Haruka's face.

As Makoto's kneeling over Haruka, his body completely exposed to him, Haruka silently blesses the heavens for giving him someone *so* beautiful. Haruka finds the momentary strength to sit up in bed to kiss him, feeling his own erection brush up against Makoto's in their accidental closeness. Makoto takes a sharp intake of breath from all that second's worth of sensation, and Haruka decides he just wants more of it. With Haruka's arms wrapped around him, Makoto collapses completely on top of Haruka, their hips both pressed together and generating a warm, wet heat in between their thighs. Haruka plunges his pelvis upward towards Makoto's as they crash into each other for more kisses, the fervor of everything making his knees absolutely weak.

"Ah..." Haruka moans out in between kisses, fully aware of how they're pushed together at this point. This isn't just a matter of being naked with Makoto; *skin on skin* is one thing, but to feel the most intimate parts against him, pulsating and twitching and full of heat—that's just an entirely new *universe* of sensation, and this is something Haruka is ready to accept.

"H-Haru...can I..."

Haruka just nods incoherently at whatever Makoto wants to do. He feels Makoto reach between Haruka's legs with a sweaty palm, grasping onto him with a firm and careful grip. Makoto has *definitely* shed his shyness at this point, and Haruka's only relishing every millisecond of it. As Makoto begins to pump Haruka's length with his grip, his motions rhythmic and steady, Haruka tries in all futility to suppress the moans that escape his lips. It

doesn't matter if he's never been touched by someone else before. It's embarrassing, to be heard like this, each gasp and groan sounding like he's begging for his life. It's too earnest, Haruka thinks, but he knows that this is what comes with intimacy. It's just one of those things he'll have to get used to.

It's just his hands. Haruka's done this to himself before, if not more since *Makoto* started drifting into his head. *How can it feel this good?*

Haruka doesn't have to think too hard to find the answer.

"Is this okay?" Makoto asks. Haruka just gives a weak nod in response. Of course this is okay. It's more than *okay*.

"*Ma...koto...*" Haruka breathes out like he's pleading, his voice trailing off into a light whisper. He closes his eyes and lets out a breathy gasp as Makoto begins to motion faster. He has the perfect hands for this, palms so enveloping with long, thick fingers, and Haruka wonders just how much longer he's going to last like this before giving out.

"*Haru,*" Makoto goes in to kiss Haruka, and he nearly misses his lips because he's so concentrated with pleasuring him. Haruka just wraps his legs closer to Makoto's and presses his face upwards, into his chest, smothering the inescapable sounds of his moans and heavy breaths. "*Makoto*", Haruka keeps breathing into him, the hum of his voice dying on the other boy's skin. And it is here Haruka thinks he can say this name forever.

Haruka lifts his closed eyes from Makoto's body for a moment, just to get a look at his face. Makoto seems just as dazed at Haruka is, if not more so. His lips curl up in a smile, gentle as gentle can get, and Haruka knows, in this exact instant, that he doesn't *just* want to say his name forever. He wants to whisper "*Makoto*" a million times and feel his body like this a billion times more after that, tangled and bare and *right where he belongs*.

"Makoto." Haruka says once more.

"Yes, Haru?" Makoto asks, with slight concern.

"I'm home."

Makoto is the place where Haruka wants to be.

Chapter End Notes

So I've been sick for two days...time for listening to MH fanmixes, lying on the couch with a fever, and writing fic. To be honest, I'm not really sure how much longer this is going to run, but I'm having a ton of fun writing about Haruka and Makoto's exploits in Tokyo so I'm not too worried. Writing about the real start of their sexual relationship has

been on my mind when writing this, and I decided I wanted to write a chapter devoted to the idea of budding sexuality? Idk what I'm saying I'm so drained and tired and still lying on this couch. YAY FOR BEING SICK

Anyhoo, I tried to keep the fluff in the forefront, despite the smut!! And also, sorry this chapter is abnormally long, but again...a lot of time on my hands.

I'm gonna keep this short because I'm going to sleep soon. For this particular chapter, I listened to THIS killer MakoHaru playlist (<http://8tracks.com/damianwayne/blue-skies-blue-seas>) and some various sultry music...like "High for This" by The Weeknd, "I Wanna Be Yours" by the Arctic Monkeys, and "Latch" by Sam Smith.

a study in time

Chapter Summary

Haruka will gather all the seconds, minutes, and hours for Makoto.

Or, a conversation about spending your time wisely with a significant other.

Chapter Notes

Small warning: in the last section, there's a tiny mention of blood if you're not into that.

Also, follow me on twitter @asplendidmoon for more fun woooo

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

twenty-four

"Hey, Haru! Happy belated! Sorry I didn't call earlier in the week."

"It's...it's okay." Haruka says into the phone, trying to subdue the heated stammer in his voice.

The entirety of last week has been a blur to Haruka. Sometimes, there are weeks like that, where the days just melt into each other with a sort of blandness and boredom that could incapacitate an elephant, but Haruka thinks that this is a different kind of *blurring*. He can remember small things, like his mother and father calling on his birthday, a cake brought in by his teammates, a new metal-plated dolphin keychain given to him by his best friend, but this particular week has been a mess of spectacular sorts for other reasons. As he finds Makoto in the sheets for what feels like the hundredth time in a span of six days, breath quickly escaping him again, this has what made Haruka's first birthday in Tokyo a little more special than the rest.

All in all, he really *cannot* keep his hands off Makoto. But perhaps this is what they call new love.

"Should we stop?" Makoto whispers into Haruka's other ear. "Rin took the time to call."

Haruka just shakes his head and smooches Makoto lightly on the cheek, signaling him to keep going. Makoto frowns a little bit, probably thinking *'this is so wrong,'* before sighing and retreating into the crevice of Haruka's neck as surrender. Makoto's tongue feels warm and

wet against his skin, and there's no doubt he's going to leave hickeys *again* with the way he's nibbling at Haruka.

"How was your birthday? Do anything fun?"

"Mm." Haruka can barely keep his phone balanced between his ear and his shoulder as Makoto licks Haruka slowly with the length of his tongue. Taking the device back into his hands, he reaches up from the bed to kiss Makoto for what feels like the thousandth time in a span of ten minutes, with Rin still on the other end of the line. Haruka's glad Makoto's gotten a little more comfortable with his tongue, because it means he can use his more without reservation, too. Gasping into Makoto's mouth, Haruka dives back into kiss him before realizing that he should *actually* be holding a conversation.

Well, it's not like Haruka was ever good at that, anyway.

"Are you there?"

"Yeah..." Haruka breathes out a little too hard into the phone as Makoto slides the side of his shirt up with his hand slowly, the pressure of his touch nice and firm up Haruka's chest. Haruka lets out a small moan at the friction, feeling the goosebumps form on his skin and the heightened static behind his ears.

Makoto lifts Haruka's shirt right over his head, accidentally forcing the phone out of Haruka's hand altogether. It bangs against the headboard of Makoto's bed, and Haruka can hear the blare of Rin's yelling on his end. Haruka blindly reaches for the speakerphone button as he helps Makoto out of his own shirt, about ready to just to hang up altogether. Rin can call next year, or in two years, or in twenty, for all Haruka cares right now.

"What the hell are you doing?" Rin asks, in what sounds like agitation. *"What was that noise?"*

"Training." Haruka says, sitting up and wrapping his arms around Makoto, delicately placing a kiss on the top of his lips. Makoto sighs and releases a breathy little laugh before kissing Haruka right back, taking Haruka's smaller hands and lacing them with his.

"I thought I heard Makoto. Are you working out with him right now?"

Haruka just wants to laugh, but Makoto's face just goes especially red with his eyes blinking wide. He buries his head in Haruka's shoulder and shakes his head in what Haruka can only see as embarrassment. *'Working out.'* Well, that's one way of looking at things.

"He's helping me train for my next heat." Haruka lies. "I'll be in top condition."

Haruka hears Rin scoff over the phone. *"Top condition? No offense to Makoto, but I'll be out of this world with the program I'm in. They have us running every day, you know, with mandatory gym visits for abdominal work..."*

Rin's voice trails off, muffled under tossed blankets when Makoto throws Haruka back down on the sheets.

"You're less timid now." Haruka says to Makoto. He only responds with his a lingering set of fingers over the zipper of Haruka's pants.

Makoto smiles and nods his head a little to the side rather shyly. "Getting there." Makoto kisses Haruka and unbuttons his jeans, undoing the zipper and digging his hands under the material of Haruka's jammers. It doesn't take long for Makoto's hands to find the right place, his long, circled fingers taking a hold of Haruka with a snug grip.

"Good?" Makoto asks with a slight frown, still unsure. He does this whenever he's touching him or licking him down there at first, always unsure if he's even doing the right thing.

Haruka just nods from the pillow, closing his eyes and taking a deep, shuddering breath. 'Good.'

"Hey, are you even listening to me?" Rin asks over the phone.

"No," Haruka says bluntly with his voice trailing off into a groan, cupping his mouth with his hands when Makoto starts to really work with his hands.

"Thought so! So rude. Well...just called to say hi anyway. I should get back to training, too. I'm not going to let you beat me."

"B-bye..." Haruka breathes back on the pillow as Makoto leans over to suck on Haruka's chest, brushing his tongue over a nipple and gliding his lips over the edge of his collarbones.

"Later, Haru."

With the sound of a dead dial tone, Haruka swipes his phone to the ground and closes his eyes back on the pillow. He's really beginning to feel in sync with Makoto's rhythm before he feels his grip start to lighten until it's nothing. Haruka jolts up in bed to find Makoto looking on the floor for his phone.

"I feel bad." Makoto says. "He sounded disappointed. You haven't spoken to Rin in at least a month right? We can always do this later."

Haruka shrugs. "It's okay. He sends me koala postcards."

"Ah, you know, I actually get those, too."

"So it's fine." Haruka adds.

"Are you sure?" Makoto asks.

"Yes."

"I just...don't want to take anything away from you. You know, we've been spending *a lot* of alone time this week, and—"

"You don't like it?" Haruka asks with a frown.

"No, *no*, that's not it at all! I love this time together." He says the word *together* like all the oxygen's left his system, and he's trying so hard to hide the traces of a smile on his face for the sake of seriousness. Still, the small upward curve of Makoto's lips betray him for an instant, and he ends up mashing his mouth closed to prevent any other expression.

"I just don't want to get in the way of other things, like other friends and training. I don't know if I'm making sense." Makoto says. "I just feel bad for some reason. Like I'm stealing you away."

Haruka wants to say something like, *'I like being together too'* or *'There's no one else I'd rather be with.'*

He wants to tell Makoto, *'I like it when you steal me away.'*

"But I have the time." Haruka says instead.

"You *really* sure?"

"Yes." Haruka doesn't care about being ten minutes late to practice, or missing belated birthday phone calls. He knows he can't miss the big occurrences, that he'll have to be apart from Makoto for things like training camps and lectures and races—really whatever Tokyo wants to throw at them next—but he will gather the time for him nonetheless. Haruka will do it if it's Makoto, and it doesn't matter what they'll do with all those gathered minutes, seconds, hours: the point is that they'll be together.

"And you?" Haruka asks Makoto. *'Do you like it when I steal you away?'*

"Well, there's no one I'd rather be with." Makoto laughs, tapping Haruka with a small kiss. "But..." he trails off.

"I should call Rin back?" Haruka finishes his sentence. Makoto just nods with a smile.

"Well, if you want."

Haruka shrugs and wraps his arms around Makoto, hovering ever so close to his mouth for what seems like a longing kiss, full of sighs. The bedroom has rescinded into a familiar quiet as Haruka leans further in and further in. Makoto actually closes his eyes too, before Haruka suddenly stops within a microsecond of meeting his lips.

"I'll send him a koala postcard." he whispers.

Makoto's laughing when Haruka actually tries going in for a real kiss.

"You're really too funny, Haru."

With that, Makoto scoops Haruka up in his arms and presses him down into the mattress, traces of soft laughter escaping his lips between each serious kiss Haruka tries to initiate. This sets the course for the rest of the afternoon, where there's no more talk of koala postcards or the returning phone calls or the stealing of precious time.

nine

In Iwatobi, seeing Makoto for nine straight days is nothing worth noting. Nine days is only a fraction of the *everyday* they usually spend together.

In Tokyo, it is world record for the two of them. It is the unlikely meeting of two diverted individuals for nine consecutive days of marathon hand-holding, kissing, *other things*, and simply spending time together. Nine, in short, is a small phenomenon in the absence of the *everyday's* existence.

Tokyo doesn't usually allow for *everyday*.

As Haruka ties his apron around his waist and clicks the stove on in his kitchen alone, he retraces those past nine days with reluctant glee as he prepares himself a mackerel dinner for one. He's had time to recollect himself from the blur he's been living in for the past week and a half, and he's been relishing in his thoughts all day.

Day one: He likes to replay Makoto's face now and then, upon seeing Haruka naked for the first time. He remembers his words, '*I just really love you, Haru,*' and how that sends more a shiver down his spine than any of the touching. Well, *no*, that's not right, either. Haruka likes it when Makoto touches him, but his words are more detrimental to Haruka's composure than anything else.

Day two: June 30th. There is almost no streak to be had because Haruka didn't get to see Makoto at all the next day, and he doesn't like to count the mornings when both of them are predictably sleep-deprived and just a tiny bit grouchy. On this particular morning, Makoto races out the door with nothing but a distant peck on the cheek for Haruka. He doesn't hear from Makoto for the rest of the day actually, until he reappears at Haruka's door at precisely 7:45 PM with a small gift box in the palm of his hand.

"Happy birthday," he says.

Haruka remembers opening the box to find a metal-plated dolphin keychain, garnished off with a blue rhinestone eye.

"You can actually carry this one around." Makoto says, referring to the old dolphin toy that Haruka still keeps in his bathtub. "Only if you want to, though."

Haruka remembers just pulling him into the apartment and hugging him against the closed door with a kiss, a silent *thank you* of sorts.

Day three: A series of simple pleasures. Haruka refers to it as the second great exploration, with a speciality in the use of tongue and an introduction to blowjobs. Haruka still thinks about how he could rest in between Makoto's thighs forever. Watching him shudder was a delight.

Day four: Much of the same as the previous day, only on Makoto's bed and much earlier in the afternoon. (Which definitely left more time for play, Haruka thinks, even if Makoto was constantly afraid of being walked in by his roommate.)

Day five: A home cooked meal and napping on the floor. Both of them are too tired to do much else after a full day of training drills and lectures, so they are content just falling asleep next to each other after eating and a bit of reading. Haruka remembers waking up to Makoto holding onto him just a little bit closer, stuck to his chest, while murmuring about something in a pleasant-sounding dream. Haruka recalls just closing his eyes, wanting to fall right back asleep before Makoto has a chance to wake up and catch him staring.

(Later Makoto would say, *"You know, you look really cute when you're asleep."*)

(And Haruka would just respond with a thrown pillow to the face.)

Day six: On the days Makoto comes to Haruka's races, he always takes his place in row three, seat five. He remembers Makoto's small wave and a determined nod everytime Haruka takes his mark on the starting block. Now, Haruka is not one to believe in things like *luck*, but he did place first in the 100-meter and second in the 200-meter that day, with better times than he's ever posted before. He likes to thank the hearty mackerel breakfast he had before the race, but it's not like doesn't have Makoto in mind, too. Well, in all reality, Makoto is *very* much on his mind.

Also, this is the day Makoto finds out about the nickname the other swimmers have given to Haruka. His jaw almost drops right off his face when he hears the calls of *love bite boy*, and he later makes a declaration to never kiss Haruka on the neck again.

(Fortunately, this is one promise Makoto can't keep for long.)

Day seven: After Makoto's roommate goes home for the weekend, Haruka decides he wants to get to know Makoto's bed better. Following the *very* short phone conversation with Rin, and the even briefer discussion about koala postcards and returning calls, the two of them resume exploration for another good hour or two, kissing every inch of skin they find on each other.

Amidst nibbling up the flesh of Haruka's inner thigh, Makoto almost receives the shock of his life when Haruka grabs his arm and says the following in a breathy, pleading voice:

"We should have sex."

Makoto tumbles right off the bed upon hearing the suggestion of having sex *for the first time* in *that* sort of begging voice. He almost takes Haruka with him, and there is certainly no sex to be had that day. A concerned knock from a floormate comes at the door instead, and that only mortifies Makoto into stopping altogether.

Day eight: They do their internet research (much to Makoto's insistence of *"Private browsing! Make sure you're on private browsing!"*) and decide to try having sex for the first time. It's clear just how nervous Makoto is about the whole thing when he's kneeling over Haruka and unable to do much else besides hide in the nape of Haruka's neck, abnormally

quiet with his whole body shakier than usual. Haruka just takes his trembling hand and kisses him gently, keeping their faces close.

"Whenever you're ready." Haruka says. "You can have me then."

He's in no rush.

Day nine: With another break from their private expeditions, Haruka teaches Makoto a few things about the kitchen. Makoto's certainly not terrible, at least not *as* terrible since coming to the city and living on his own, but he could always use the extra help. This is especially true if Makoto expects to help out at the party he's helping out at the next day.

Haruka is teaching him how to make a basic beef stew when he notices the nagging little frown on Makoto's face, reoccurring over the facade of his usual smile. He's probably still bothered about the day before.

"It's fine." Haruka says simply.

"I know. But still."

Haruka just sighs, tugs him on the shirt sleeve, and tells him to come to the supermarket with him for more vegetables. While they're putting their shoes on, Haruka takes the time to sneak in a small hug against the door, which Makoto takes in without a problem.

Day ten:

Haruka's thinking there won't actually *be* a tenth today. Pressing his phone on to check the time, it's already getting close to eight o' clock, and he hasn't seen Makoto all day. He's been busy volunteering at his neighborhood swim club and now he's probably setting up for the *beginning-of-the-summer* party his university friends have been planning for weeks now. Makoto had invited him on several occasions leading up to today, about three times in their past nine days, but Haruka always answered the same way with each invite.

"Only if I have time."

Haruka certainly has the time today. Taking the grilled mackerel off the stove and flipping it onto his plate, he makes a mental checklist of all the things he had planned for today.

Finish his economics homework? Check.

Rewatch Olympic footage? Check.

Call Rin back? It's another short call because he's busy working out with Sousuke, but check.

Do the laundry? Check.

Make dinner? Haruka rips a bit of fish off the plate, eating it before getting to the table. Check.

So, in all reality, Haruka does have the time to attend this party, but he's just not sure if he really wants to go. A tenth day with Makoto would be nice, but he's also not in the business of attending unfamiliar social gatherings where he barely knows anyone.

There's also the matter of Makoto's five friends, who have seen the *mystery* article. He has managed to avoid the question '*Why Tokyo?*' for as long as he's been with Makoto now, and he knows seeing any of them might put that in jeopardy. If Makoto's not going to ask the question, one of them will. And it doesn't matter if it's out of bored curiosity or polite conversation; Haruka just doesn't want it to be asked, because he knows it'll bother him too much to lie.

And he thinks it'd be best to spare everyone from what some might deem 'an uncomfortable silence.'

Nine days. It was nice while it lasted. Haruka thinks he'll just call Makoto tomorrow to ask about dinner. For now, he's content with sitting at home with a plate of mackerel. He digs in between the bones for another piece when he hears his phone go off on the kitchen counter. Taking the plate with him, Haruka goes to check who it is. It's a text from Makoto.

Haru! We're having a bit of an emergency here in the kitchen...can you come over?

Haruka frowns at the text message. Normally, Makoto would call if it was really an urgent matter.

What happened? Haruka texts back. He waits another five minutes, picking at his mackerel as he stares at the chat window, but Makoto never gets back to him.

Hello? He texts ten minutes later. Still no response.

Haruka thinks about ignoring the message altogether, since he has no idea where in Tokyo Makoto is, anyway. He tells himself it can't be anything too terrible, since there's bound to be someone in their group who can cook and fix whatever trouble Makoto's gotten into. Still, with fingers hovering over the keyboard of his phone, Haruka types out the following message:

I'm coming. Where are you?

With another *ping* of his phone, Haruka receives an address and nothing more, but it's enough for Haruka to drop the rest of his mackerel, find his shoes, and head out the door for the next train to Makoto.

Maybe day ten's going to happen after all.

00:00:00

Haruka assumes he's come to the right place when he hears the dull hum of pop music and the mixed, mumbled voices of friendly conversation. Standing outside the door of a house he's never been to, he presses the doorbell tentatively and waits for a response, fiddling with the plastic bag of random mandarin oranges he has gripped in the other hand. He never knows what to bring to these sorts of events, but the idea of fruit seems to coincide well with the beginning of summer, so Haruka thinks it's enough. He doesn't want to say he's *nervous*;

this isn't a room full of scouts, nor is there an Olympic pool waiting on the other side, but he thinks back to something that's drifted into his mind before:

It's weird meeting your friends' other friends.

He rings the bell again when no one comes to collect him. Haruka hears an unfamiliar voice shout, "*I'm coming, I'm coming!*" before the door pushes open with a loud creak. It's one of the five, the stout boy from Kyoto who used to swim competitively. He's holding a whole watermelon under his arm, with Makoto's phone in his other hand.

And it is in that brief moment of clarity where Haruka realizes he's been tricked.

Or rather, he's *let* himself be tricked.

"Ah, there you are. Nanase Haruka! Thought you wouldn't show up." He shows Haruka a clever smile, and it's there he notices a considerable gap between the other boy's two front teeth. If he was on Haruka's swim team, he'd no doubt be *gap-tooth boy*, which is still an infinity times better than the name they've given to Haruka.

"You told me to come here." Haruka says plainly.

"Right." Gap-tooth boy says, without a hint of apology. "One of our cooks is out sick, and Makoto is always telling us how good you are in the kitchen. Thought you'd be worth a try. Save the party!" He adds with a laugh, and then his face turns grave. "Seriously, though."

Makoto is always telling us how good you are in the kitchen. Haruka blushes at that, but he just turns his head away and shrugs. "I'm okay," he says.

"So, will you help us?" he asks. "Makoto's out at the supermarket right now, but he should be back soon."

He's tempted to say '*too much trouble*' and take the next train home, but then he imagines poor Makoto running around with a shopping cart getting last minute ingredients.

"I guess." Haruka says.

"Great! Your help is so appreciated. I'm *really* in your debt." Gap-tooth boy beckons Haruka to come inside, where he finds that the house is surprisingly empty. Going into the kitchen, he realizes that most people are out in the backyard right outside of the sliding door, chatting amongst themselves, playing with sparklers, and tapping away on their phones. It doesn't take too long for gap-tooth boy to join them, leaving Makoto's phone on the counter and holding up the watermelon above his head.

"Hey guys, I've got the watermelon!" A series of lackluster cheers emerge from the small crowd. "And a *cook!*" The second round of applause is just a bit louder this time.

At least he has the kitchen to himself. For the second time tonight, Haruka ties on an apron and stands over a stove alone, clicking on the dials and looking for the right pot to cook what looks like the components of a basic beef stew. He crouches down in front of one of the cupboards when he notices a set of pink- slippered feet next to him.

"I think this is what you're looking for."

Haruka looks up at a girl putting a pot on the stove, lowering the heat and smiling down at him. It's one of the five again, and he's sure it's the girl that confessed to Makoto almost a month ago, if Haruka remembers correctly. He stands back up to find that she's redirected her attention to the small window over the stove, which just offers a peripheral view of the backyard.

"You're Nanase Haruka, right?" She asks. "Tachibana-kun's friend?" She says the word *friend* like it strains her to say it.

Haruka can't really bring himself to say yes, because the word feels oddly limiting. He looks out the window too, seeing the faint glow of dying sparklers and the glowed silhouettes of the faceless. As he silently prepares the rest of the ingredients with her, adding in chicken stock to the pot and a bit of water from the sink, he can't help but momentarily sneak glances at the window on the off-chance Makoto might join the rest of them.

On his third glance, he does spot Makoto in the backyard. All of his friends are forcing him to drop his grocery bags (and there's a fair amount of them) to take a sparkler in his hands. He obliges, if not a bit reluctantly, and joins a bunch of acquaintances in conversation that Haruka can't make out. Makoto looks like he's having fun, with his mouth stretching into soft laughter. This is when Haruka has to remind himself that Makoto exists in a world outside his own, and that other people can make him laugh, too.

When Haruka turns his attention back briefly to the girl, he realizes she's been staring at Makoto too, her eyes lowered in a hazy solemnness. Well, in fact, she's *still* staring at him, so entranced that she doesn't notice she still has carrots to chop up.

Haruka looks away and breathes a small sigh. He forgets that other people look at Makoto like this, too.

"You know him well, right?" She asks out of the silence, continuing with her work on the cutting board. She's struggling with actually cutting anything, so Haruka volunteers to switch places with her, which she gladly obliges.

"Well..." Haruka trails off, picking up the knife.

"It's okay. He talks about you a lot." she laughs softly. "I know way more about you than I should. Like that you like mackerel and pineapple together. That's a little gross."

"One person's opinion," Haruka says with a slight frown out the window. A beat of silence comes after that.

He talks about you a lot.

"You guys also grew up together."

"Yeah." Haruka says.

"Captain and vice-captain."

"Mm."

"You take your baths very seriously."

"Very."

She doesn't say anything after that, so Haruka keeps chopping carrots without another word. He has no interest in continuing the conversation.

"He really does like you, huh?" she asks suddenly.

Haruka looks back at the girl, unable to hide the unrest on his face. "What?" he asks, trying to maintain feigned ignorance.

"Is this new information for you?" she asks. "He said he was going to tell you."

"No." Haruka admits simply.

"Well, you're lucky. I've confessed to him *twice*, and it's always the same answer for him. You should see his face light up when he gives his reasons. It's like...he doesn't *mean* to look so happy about rejecting someone, but I don't think he can help it." She laughs a bit, raising her eyes to the ceiling before rolling them altogether.

Haruka wants to ask, "*What did Makoto say?*" without seeming too eager, but he can't come up with the right question to ask.

"Do you want to know? What he's said?"

Haruka gives a shrug like he doesn't care either way, but it's *all* he wants to know.

"'I have someone that's dear to me.' That's what he said to me the first time. 'I like this person a lot, and I will continue to like this person. That's why I can't accept you.' He was so polite, too. Very shy about it." she says with a sigh, but it seems to be more of a release than anything else. "Then I asked if he was *sure* about that, and yeah. He never once denied it."

"Ah." Haruka breathes out, feeling the air leave his system.

"And then the second time I confessed again, thinking that things *might've* changed, well, that was the night we bumped into you two at the ramen shop." She nods a little, as if trying to recall things correctly. "After you ran off, I met him outside again to give him my feelings."

"Okay." Another one-word answer comes out *again*, like he's taking all of this in stride, but his innards are more-or-less a bubbling, dying mess. He feels his ears burn up again, and that sensation of a swinging cinder block knocking all the oxygen out of him.

"He just apologized to me again. He was like, 'I'm really sorry, but...*well*...'"

Before continuing, she looks out the window again, as does Haruka. Makoto's sparkler is about to fade out, and it looks like he's antsy to get inside with his groceries.

"*I really do love him.*" she continues. "He used the word *love* with me."

She's shaking her head like she can't believe it. Haruka doesn't blame her. He has a hard time believing someone like Makoto can exist, too.

"He said...I really love Haru, and I don't think I've ever loved anyone like this before.' He was...*gushing*. And so nervous again...I've never seen him so nervous about anything."

Haruka needs a couple of seconds to process her latest testimonial.

I don't think I've ever loved anyone like this before.

His eyes linger on Makoto outside again. The last bit of his sparkler is about gone, but before he puts it out in a pail of water near him, he closes his eyes as if he's making a wish or saying a small prayer. He's alone in the crowd, with everyone else dispersed into their own little groups, so no one seems to notice his small, superstitious gesture.

"He loves you." The girl says at the same time Makoto's face lights up with a smile, and Haruka instantly recognizes it as the same kind he's shown Haruka for all these years.

He loves you.

"Ah," is all Haruka can seem to say. Makoto has vanished from the window's line of sight.

And now Haruka's the one entranced, and he's so distracted by all these words of wild affirmation, at this quiet sight of Makoto and his dying sparkler, that he doesn't even notice how badly he's cut his hand on the knife he's holding.

"Oh! Nanase—"

"I'm back with the curry powder! I'm sorry it took so long!" Makoto calls out, before sliding the door open and stepping into the kitchen.

"Makoto." Haruka accidentally blurts out, in a voice so quiet he's not even sure Makoto can hear it.

"*Haru!*" Makoto's eyes go wide. "You're here. Oh, *no*, wait...you're bleeding." He grabs a washcloth from the counter and attends to Haruka almost instantly, pressing the cool, wet fabric to his palm to stop the blood from dripping down his wrist. It stings a little when he applies it, but it's not unbearable. Haruka looks up at Makoto, not really sure of what to say or do next, his hand shaking under the tender care of Makoto's grip.

"You two take care of that. I'll handle dinner." the girl says with a smile.

"Thanks, Emi." Makoto bows his head lightly, placing an arm over Haruka's shoulder and leading him down the hall. Haruka hears Makoto call to someone about a first aid kit and some bandages, but even his voice is but a muffled blur in this particular instant. He can only concentrate on the warm hand on his back, the image of the small smile, the dying sparkler, and the girl's words, ringing and clear. *He loves you*, Emi urges on. *He loves you*.

This is something he's already heard from Makoto before, in small spaces with their faces close and their hands held.

Haruka just never knew that Makoto was willing to tell it to the world, or at least the new one he's found himself in.

"Are you okay, Haru?" Makoto asks him. "That looks bad."

Haruka nods, dazed. He doesn't know how to answer Makoto, because he's not sure how deep the cut is or why the gash isn't hurting as much as it should be.

All Haruka knows, in this particular instant, with knees shaking and heat racing up his back like electricity, is that he has to tell Makoto before the night is over.

'I love you,' is something he has to say, with all ringing clarity.

With *'I love you, too,'* for all the times he's never been able to respond with words.

And *'I really love you,'* for added measure.

Haruka won't let the night end without letting Makoto know. He'll steal all the time in the world if he has to, just for that chance to tell him.

Chapter End Notes

Another long chapter written on a coach bus back to NYC. I can feel this particular fic coming to an end soon (probably two more chapters to go, at most) and it's been a great ride so far. This particular chapter focuses on the aspect of time, with bits of sexual exploration and the whole idea of meeting your friends' other friends. Again, I think it's important to include the new people Haruka and Makoto have met in Tokyo, but I never try to give them too much personality because the fic isn't about them. Like, I don't want to create OCs that step out too far from the background, haha...

The second part of the chapter, titled 'nine' has the same feel as my one shot, and I thought it was a nice break from just straight out writing a new section. I do like mixing things up sometimes, and I wanted a semi-compact way to show their nine consecutive days together. Again, although nine days doesn't seem like anything when they were in Iwatobi, I think seeing someone for nine consecutive days in a bustling city with differing schedules is a big deal, so I wanted to convey that. I guess being in college myself, I find it hard to coordinate seeing the same people all the time because everyone's always constantly moving and doing their own thing. So it shows they're making the time to see each other? (or they're just really in that "new love" phase where

they really can't keep their hands off each other for too long...) Man, this afterword is getting so long. I need to shut up (๑´ ̘ `๑)

Anyhoo, musically, I went back to "Dearly Beloved" for some parts but also listened to "At Home" by the Crystal Fighters, "Ribs" by Lorde, "Love Me Harder" by Ariana Grande, and "Slow and Steady" by Of Monsters and Men, just to name the random songs. This is also really weird but when I write fic at home I can't concentrate unless I have CNN on mute in the background...I know, it's strange. Anyhoo, till next time!

sweet nothings

Chapter Summary

You might stumble on your way there, but he'll light up at the words no matter how you say them.

Chapter Notes

Reminder you can also find me sulking about mh on twitter: @asplendidmoon huhuhu

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

1200

"Good as new."

After Makoto wraps the last bit of gauze around Haruka's hand, he brings it up to his face to sneak a small kiss for extra precaution.

"Thank you." Haruka says in a whisper, still unable to look Makoto in the eye after twenty minutes of sitting with him alone. He's trying to come up with the best way to say it, to bring up his *'I like you's'* and his *'I love you's'* without feeling so silly about the entire thing. And at this point, he knows there's no reason to feel anything even *close* to silly, because they've been like this before, alone and quiet with the deepening night. He should be used to being here like this with Makoto.

They're together on the front steps of the house, under the dim light of the neighborhood street lamps and the hazy glow of a half-full moon. The hum of the early summer crickets isn't too frenetic or gratingly loud tonight, and neither does the air hang too humid or hot. This particular block has been nothing but quiet, save for a few residents walking their dogs and salarymen coming home late from work, and no one from the party has bothered him or Makoto to come inside.

In short, Haruka knows this is the time to tell him, right here, right at this exact moment.

He just can't bring himself to say it.

"Are you okay?" Makoto asks for what feels like the hundredth time.

"Mm." Haruka nods. "It's nothing."

"You really worry me sometimes." Makoto says, only half-jokingly it seems, from the way his eyes hang low and subdued. "You never cut yourself in the kitchen. I mean, I've *seen* you with a knife before. You could be a cook, if it wasn't for swimming."

'Your fault.' Haruka thinks while sneaking a small frown at his best friend, feeling a slight burning sensation from the skin of his wrapped hand. Haruka wouldn't be in this mess if Makoto didn't say things like *I really love Haru* and *I don't think I've ever loved anyone like this before*, and he wouldn't feel the dire need to say the same exact things right back.

'I really love Makoto,' he tries out in his head. *'And I don't think I've ever loved anyone like this before.'*

No, that doesn't sound right to Haruka at all.

This, after all, is Makoto's way of saying things. Earnest and leaving nothing to be imagined. It's Makoto's unique combination of words, and it's the way he chose to string his letters together. Haruka wonders how Makoto even came to that particular arrangement, how he even came to realize that he *really loved* Haruka, when the word *love* seems plenty enough on its own.

And then there's the next part. *I don't think I've ever loved anyone like this before*. It's these specific set of words that really make Haruka dizzy than anything else.

And Makoto probably didn't *choose* to string any of those words together. They probably just happened, and it's the way it *should* happen.

"Haru." Makoto calls out, his bandaged hand still resting in Makoto's palm, blanketed by the warmth of his other. "Your hand's still shaking."

"I'm fine."

"You're not fine." Makoto says with a sigh. "And I know it has nothing to do with this cut." His suspicions, of course, are right. Haruka has the littlest defenses when it comes to Makoto, and now even those are quickly failing him.

"Is something wrong?" he asks.

Haruka finds it in himself to look up back at Makoto.

'Here we go.'

This is when the strangest thing happens to Haruka. Some might see it as the *phenomenon of an attempted first*. The second Haruka opens his mouth in preparation to say his first *'I love you,'* the crickets seem to stop chirping altogether, and the air seems to stifle and lose all movement. Any of the shoddy, flickering street lamps down the street brighten up their bulbs and come alive again, hovering above the both of them like an all-imposing spotlight.

Soon all Haruka can hear, over the crickets and the neighbors' barking dogs, is the drumming of his temple against his skull and the small sighs of breath escaping from Makoto's lips.

All he can see, above everything else, is Makoto.

Just Makoto.

'He's here. Right next to you.' Haruka urges himself. *'Say it. Just say it.'*

"Makoto." Haruka breathes out, trying to keep as calm as he'd usually be, but the last syllable leaves his mouth in voice that's barely audible.

"Yes?"

'Go on.'

But before Haruka can even go on saying the next word, the front door flies open and two of Makoto's friends come out onto the steps. Gap-toothed boy has a plate of sliced watermelon in his clutches and Haruka recognizes the girl from the underground band from the way she's strumming an acoustic guitar. They both go to Makoto first, completely dispelling the peaceful silence lingering in the air before.

"Ah, why don't you two lovebirds just come inside already?" The girl says. Haruka's not sure if she's serious about that or not, because Makoto hasn't stopped holding his hand in between the confines of his, their closeness as blatant as the light of day.

Gap-toothed boy smiles at Haruka and Makoto, putting down the plate of watermelon and wringing his his arms around the both of them, nudging his head right in between.

"Heard you cut yourself in my kitchen!" He looks down and clicks a tongue when Makoto partially reveals the bandages on Haruka's hand between the crevice of his fingers. "Ah, I really do owe you, don't I?" He adds.

"Owe him?" Makoto asks gap-toothed boy with a slight frown.

"Koji's the one who tricked your friend into coming here." The other girl adds casually.

"You *what*?"

"Don't kill me!" Gap-toothed boy, *Koji*, unlatches himself from the both of them and goes scuttling back inside the door. Only the girl with the guitar remains, strumming mindlessly with her fingers before twirling around and going back to head inside. Before she shuts the door, she looks over her shoulder and whistles once.

"Come in when you two are ready. Emi made a cake." Then she leaves, leaving the two of them alone again.

But it's too late by now.

The moment has passed. Haruka just stares down at his shoes and feels the street lights around them dim again. The crickets are back, louder than ever, as is the barking of the neighbor's dog and the dull hum of the backyard party. As soon as Haruka can feel the rush of

air return into his squeezed-out lungs, that last step out from that *phenomenon of an attempted first*, he knows he's wasted his precious time.

Above all, Haruka loses all the pent-up nerve to say his first *'I love you'* to Makoto.

Twenty minutes, or twelve hundred seconds of nerve, gone in an instant. It's funny how fast fear takes over.

"I can't believe that guy. How did he even trick you?" Makoto asks, still distracted by this revelation. "Did he lure you with a can of mackerel?"

"A text." Haruka answers quietly. "He has your phone."

"Figures. I'll look for it later." Makoto sighs, leaving a beat of silence afterwards. He wraps his hands around Haruka's just a bit tighter, as if it's a small and silent *sorry* for all the trouble tonight. Haruka notices there are a lot of those between them, and usually it's Haruka who delivers these small little gestures of *thank you* and *sorry* without the actual use of breath, but he forgets that Makoto's perfectly capable of them, too.

'It's okay.' Haruka says by leaning his head on Makoto's shoulder. The silence continues comfortably as Haruka tries to regain his breath.

"Say...Haru."

"Mm?"

"You were going to tell me something, weren't you? Before they came for us?"

"Ah."

"Well?"

"It's nothing." Haruka's instincts tell him to blurt out.

Makoto sighs. "I know it's not *nothing*."

Haruka *really* doesn't want to lie to him.

"I wanted a kiss."

"A...kiss?"

Haruka nods. He's not being a complete fraud, because Haruka always wants to kiss him anyway, and he thinks it's enough to catch Makoto off-guard and dispel his suspicions for at least a moment. Makoto frowns a bit before relenting a tired smile, leaning over to kiss Haruka with a light peck on the cheek.

There's a sigh at the end of his kiss, and that's when Haruka knows he hasn't been able to trick Makoto. His suspicions are confirmed when Makoto just looks back at Haruka with a face that reads, *'I know you're lying,'* eyebrows slightly arched in worry and his mouth curling

into a vague frown. Makoto's eyes lower just a bit with drooping shoulders, and all of these are such small, almost-unnoticeable motions, but it's enough for Haruka to know he's not in the clear just yet. Once again, Haruka thinks of those *littlest defenses* of his. How negligible they must be in the face of Makoto, who's spent the better part of his life learning how to tear down every single one.

"If you don't want to say what's wrong right now, it's okay." Makoto says with another huff of breath. "I just don't like seeing you bothered, you know?"

Haruka knows. Of course he does. He just kisses Makoto gently without a response before his friends start calling him inside.

"Ah." Makoto looks back at them. "They're yelling for us. Are you coming back inside? Or should I go back with you?"

Haruka shakes his head. If there's one thing he knows right now, it's that he wants Makoto to stay here tonight. Haruka *wants* Makoto to be around his new friends, even if he's not comfortable doing the same. Makoto belongs to Tokyo as much as he belongs to their world, too. There's no denying this anymore.

"No." Haruka shakes his head. "You go."

"And you?" Makoto asks.

"Don't worry about me."

"But I do." Makoto says. "I do worry about you—"

"Well, *don't*." Haruka accidentally snaps. The second the word, *the wrong kind of word*, hits his lips like a dull thud, Haruka knows he's made a mistake. He doesn't mean any bit of it, not at any of it at all, but Makoto just takes it all in with a sad little smile and nothing else. He stares ahead and continues to hold Haruka's shaking hand.

"So, what now?" Makoto asks out of the silence.

Haruka knows Makoto means this in the context of *right now*, but the questions looms darker over his head than it should. It's just another unanswered question, another bout of silence.

What now? Why Tokyo? What are we? What's wrong? These are questions that Haruka's never been able to answer.

"I'll be in soon." Haruka says, just giving him an answer for the sake of an answer. "Go first."

"Yeah?" Makoto asks, a little surprised.

"Yeah." Haruka says empty.

With that last word, Haruka feels Makoto's grip lighten on his hand. It's a sensation he's still getting used to everytime Makoto does this, like he's never going to feel that warmth again.

It's an irrational fear, and Haruka knows it is because he *knows* Makoto isn't going anywhere, but it doesn't stop it all from flooding back. He thinks of fireworks, of words barked out, of words Haruka never meant to say, snapped right in the heat of the moment, and that lingering feeling of Makoto *letting go*, a different phenomenon altogether. No, this was no phenomenon, even if it was one of their *firsts*.

Maybe a *haunting of an unwanted first* is the better way to explain it.

He thinks of Makoto's cracked voice, that revelation of '*I have decided*' and '*I'm going to a university in Tokyo.*'

And then he thinks of Makoto standing against the railings at nationals, just the two of them. '*I'm going to Tokyo to achieve that dream.*'

'*Tokyo?*' A curious underclassman would ask.

And '*Yes, Tokyo,*' was how Makoto would reply.

Tokyo. Haruka forgets how much he hated that word once.

But amongst the flurry of noise, of all the unwanted whisperings of the past, their taunting chants of *Tokyo, Tokyo, Tokyo*, Haruka hears the smallest sound, one that's not Makoto's voice or the shriek of fireworks or the frantic call of crickets, in the back of his head.

'Well, I'm here now too.'

And this is when Haruka realizes. He knows exactly how he'll say it.

Makoto gets up from his place on the steps and lets his fingers slip right out of Haruka's hand. Before going to the door, he crouches back down momentarily to kiss Haruka on the side of the head.

"See you soon?" Makoto asks.

Haruka just nods.

Makoto goes in without another word, leaving Haruka alone in the night. He stares back for a moment at the small sliver of light under the door, watching the shadow of Makoto's feet get smaller and smaller with every step further into the hallway. When Haruka's sure Makoto's far enough, he gets up, gets off the stairs, and leaves the property altogether. He feels his nerve return with every quick and ready step away from the house.

He runs off, down the block, further and further away from Makoto, but he knows he'll be back. He'll be back before the night is over.

"See you soon," Haruka whispers to himself. "*See you soon.*"

nine part two, or looking back at Iwatobi

It has been eight days since Haruka's tried telling him, and the start of day nine is already proving unbearable.

'Just say it.' Haruka tells himself, as he waits for Makoto at the top of the stairs as usual before going to school. *'Just tell him. Just tell him you're going to Tokyo, too.'*

With the morning sun beating down on him, Haruka loosens his tie and thinks of the last eight days, of all the failed strategies and sentences picked up and never finished. It shouldn't be this hard to tell his best friend, especially if they're just going to end up in the same, exact place, but so far the words have escaped him in all forms.

Day one: He thinks that maybe he'll just tell Makoto over a text message. When he begins typing, he realizes just how bad his hands are shaking, and takes it as a small sign that, *no*, this isn't how he should be doing things. He just throws his phone back into his bag and follows Makoto up the road along the beach, where his best friend is chattering on about craving an ice pop.

Day two and three: These are the two days Haruka tries composing a letter, complete with the neatest handwriting he can muster and the best stationary he's managed to find on short notice. It always starts the same with him writing, *I'm coming to Tokyo, too*, before the letters start diverging off into the strangest justifications for his decision.

I like how big the bathtubs are in Tokyo. No.

The city has a great selection of jammers. No.

The pools there are always a perfect temperature. No, no, *no*.

As Haruka crumples up another failed draft on the night of the third day, he leans back in his chair and thinks that this is impossible.

Day four: This is the first time Haruka tries telling Makoto in person, but with everyone else there too. The Iwatobi swim club is wading in the pool this afternoon, competition time over and summer quickly fading, so it's getting a little cold to be swimming outside. Haruka is about to open his mouth to tell everyone when Makoto lets out the loudest sneeze anyone in the swim club has ever heard, which only sets off Nagisa's endless chain of laughter. With Makoto mortified and chasing Nagisa by the poolside, Haruka figures that this is not the day to say it.

Day five: This is the first time Haruka tries telling Makoto alone. They're trying their best to care about homework, but in all honesty, both of them more interested in flipping through the channels while eating late-night snacks. As Makoto settles on a popular drama about two star-crossed lovers in Tokyo, a melodramatic piece of hogwash called *Doomed Love in Tokyo: The Drifting Tides*, he laughs a bit and leaves it on as background noise.

"I wonder if Tokyo's really like this," he muses.

"Yeah." Haruka says, sipping at his tea. "Well..."

Here's his chance to say it.

“Hm?” Makoto asks, perking up from his notebook.

“Ah...nothing.” Haruka says, as he looks back down at his textbook.

Day six: Haruka and Makoto are at his house again, this time watching *Doomed Love in Tokyo: The Drifting Tides 2*. Haruka waits for Makoto to bring up living in the big city again, but he never does because he ends up falling asleep on the floor within the next fifteen minutes. With a sigh, Haruka gets him a blanket and resigns himself to half-heartedly attempting homework. Today’s not the day, either.

Day seven: Haruka thinks he should just leave a brochure around and hopes Makoto gets the message. Too bad Makoto never comes over, because the cold that’s been nagging at him since day four has finally caught up to him. Stuffing the pamphlet in his pocket, Haruka goes over to bring Makoto some soup and a little company.

(And no, the brochure never does come out.)

Day eight: The conversation starts off with a question.

“Wait...have you decided on a school yet, Haru?” Makoto asks him, coughing into his sleeve and sniffing from a cold that’s still very much there. Since they’re jogging and Haruka can conveniently pretend he’s listening to his music, he just runs ahead without answering. *Just run*, he says to himself. *Just run*.

He feels a bit bad when Makoto starts calling after him down the trail.

Day nine:

And here they are, at day nine.

Makoto comes out of his house, waving to Haruka as he comes up the stairs to meet him. He looks a little less pale than yesterday, but he still has his little handkerchief in one of his hands for any potential sneezes and bouts of sniffing. Haruka digs into his pocket and hands him an extra packet of pocket tissues for later, and they both set off for school without anything much else to say.

“Makoto.” Haruka starts. *‘Just tell him.’*

“Hm?”

“I’m...going.”

“Going where?” Makoto asks.

“To Tokyo.” Haruka says. “I’m going there, too.” He braces himself for the question that he thinks Makoto’s about to ask, that dreaded question of *‘why Tokyo?’* because he doesn’t actually really know.

Well, he does, but it’s not like he’s ever going to admit it.

Makoto just smiles serenely before it really hits him. *They're going to be together in Tokyo.*

"Wait...*what? Really?*"

That particular question never comes. Haruka hopes it never does.

23:45

Haruka figures that out of the 10,710 people that read the local newspaper, one of them is bound to still have a copy *somewhere*.

He has knocked on every neighbor's door he'd never spoken to before, and he has checked every local convenience store and local cafe, only coming up empty at each uncomfortable stop. After two hours of scrounging around his neighborhood with nothing but hope on high and the thought of Makoto, *'I'm finally going to tell Makoto'*, he has come to the realization that no one, in all practicality, would think to keep a copy of a one-month-old newspaper in their home, much less a specific article in one particular section. Tokyo has moved on from *mystery boy Nanase Haruka*, and onto other enigmas of the day.

No one is going to care about the question. No one is going to ask *"Why Tokyo?"* anymore.

And Haruka only realizes this on the day he's ready to answer.

Standing outside the door of the house he had left and promised to return to, Haruka, in complete defeat and disarray, rings the doorbell for what feels like the hundredth time tonight. Checking his watch, he only has fifteen minutes left in the day. Fifteen minutes left to say what he wants to Tachibana Makoto. He rings the bell again in impatience, breathing heightened with the footsteps that get closer and closer to the front door.

The gap-toothed boy, *Koji*, comes to the door, eyes wide at the sight of Haruka.

"Whoa, you actually came back." He shows that smile of his. It always manages to look greedy, like Koji wants something out of him, but then again Haruka's only ever been treated to tricks by the former swimmer so it's not like he's had the best impression of him so far.

"Where is he?" Haruka asks, ignoring all the usual pleasantries of *hello* or *I've returned*.

"Who? *Makoto*? Man, he left *hours* ago to look for you. He tried calling, but you left your phone here."

"Ah." Haruka breathes out, shifting his glance to the side. *'Of course.'* Haruka's not sure why he thinks Makoto would have stayed.

"Do you want to come in? We still have cake."

Haruka shakes his head. "I just need my phone."

Koji nods back. "Okay. *Oh*, wait, I can ask you of another favor? It's the last one, I promise."

"I'm not cooking for you."

"It's not cooking! I promise it'll only take a second. Wait here." Koji points an index finger up and runs back into the house, keeping his word when he comes back fifteen seconds later with his phone, and in what Haruka cannot believe for a good, beguiled moment, the June sixth edition of the local newspaper.

Now, Haruka is not one to believe in things like luck, but he's getting awfully close to it.

"Could you sign this for me?" Koji asks. Of course he'd want something from Haruka again, but he's too dazed to really take offense. Haruka just takes the phone and paper into his hands and flips to the sports section, where his article and picture remains, slightly yellowed and wrinkled, but legible.

"From the way Makoto speaks of you so fondly, I'm starting to think you'll make it big. I'd like an autograph while I have the chance." Koji muses. "Before it gets too difficult."

Haruka just stares down, shaking his head in all breathless exasperation. He even smiles a little bit, for how ridiculous this whole thing is. He turns around and begins to walk away with the paper in hand, ignoring Koji at the doorstep.

"Hey! Oh come on, *not again!*" Koji yells from his house as Haruka quickens his pace into a full-out run. Haruka just raises a bandaged hand as he runs back down the street, a silent gesture of '*you said you owed me anyway,*' before tucking the newspaper under his arm and bringing his phone up to his ear to call Makoto.

Soon, Haruka hears a familiar ringtone, a midi *jingle jangle* that he'd know anywhere. It's Makoto's phone. Stopping in his tracks, Haruka glances around frantically for the sight of him.

"Haru." Makoto says, his raised voice emerging from the across the street. He shuts off his phone and puts it back in his pocket, giving Haruka a small wave, a bit apprehensive but ultimately welcoming.

"Makoto." It takes Haruka five seconds to meet him on the other side, his feet carrying him with heavy, dread-filled steps.

"Where have you been?" Makoto asks. "You always run off out of no where...you have no idea how much..." Makoto says, covering his mouth with the back of his hand. "...how much you really worry me, sometimes."

Haruka goes up to Makoto and lowers his arm from his face, putting the newspaper in his hands and holding onto his wrists for just a moment.

"Sorry." Haruka says shyly.

"For what?" Makoto asks with a small laugh.

"A lot." For snapping at him before, for always running away, for never saying the things he wants to say. At least he's starting with this.

"Oh, Haru." Makoto just shakes his head. "We're just having an off day."

Haruka just pushes the paper closer to Makoto. He doesn't want any *off days*.

"What is this?" Makoto asks.

"Page seventeen." Haruka says, keeping his eyes on Makoto. This is no time to look away from him. He knows he needs to keep his nerve.

Makoto does as he's told, flipping to the exact page.

"This is...your article." Makoto says, looking back at Haruka. "The one you ran off with."

"Have you read it?" Haruka asks. "Did anyone show this to you before?"

Makoto shakes his head. "I mean...I know *of it*. I just figured you wanted no one to see it. So I didn't look."

"Read the last part to me." Haruka says. "Please."

"Haru."

"*Please.*" Haruka says like a small plead. '*Read it before I lose all my resolve.*'

Makoto sighs and scans for the right place to start.

"Normally a typical question we ask any athlete not from the Tokyo area, this is where the mystery of Nanase...*Haruka* was born." He recites, saying his full name with an awkward pause. "Upon asking him the question, '*Why did you come to Tokyo?*' he gave his usual blunt answers."

Haruka swallows the lump in his throat, urging Makoto to press on with a nod.

"When pressed for something a little deeper...Nanase showed a twinge of emotion previously unseen throughout the entire interview." Makoto reads, periodically staring up at Haruka.

"Absolutely engrossed in the question, unable to answer, he abruptly left our offices without another word shortly after."

"You ran from the office?" He asks, interrupting the flow of the passage.

Haruka shakes his head. "Last part. Come on."

'*Almost there,*' Haruka says to himself, more than anything.

"Of all the athlete profiles we've done over the years, Nanase is definitely one of our most enigmatic." Makoto reads, clearing his throat a little. "And the question will persist as we watch his professional career unfold..." He doesn't read the last part.

"Go on." Haruka frowns. "Just...just read it."

Makoto just smiles softly at his best friend, lowering the paper away from his face. "But...I already know the answer, Haru. *Of course I know*, I knew the minute you said you told me you were coming to Tokyo, too. Why do you think I worry so much about you?"

"Don't you want to hear it from me?" Haruka asks, his whole body shaking. "For *once*?"

Makoto closes his eyes for a moment, taking a deep breath. Haruka forgets that this is a big moment for him too. Makoto knows it's coming, even if he doesn't realize it himself yet.

"And the question will persist...as we watch his professional career unfold." Makoto starts again. He pauses again.

"*Why Tokyo*?" Makoto asks.

Haruka counts three seconds of terrified silence, but he doesn't have the patience to give up any more.

"Because of you." Haruka breathes out. "Because I...I want to be with you."

Makoto just stares at him after that, relenting a sigh that just ends in a quivering smile.

"*Haru*." He sounds like he's about to cry.

"I love you." Haruka says, quietly, devoid of any breath.

And as Makoto overwhelms Haruka with the tightest hug he's ever given him, nearly lifting him right off of the ground, Haruka thinks of all the times he's ever wanted to say it. He might've not *known* all those times, he might have not known there were any *I love you's* to say, but the feeling has always threatened to break the surface and make itself present.

Haruka thinks of their argument under the fireworks and curling up in bed alone right after, miserable at the thought of Tokyo. And then thinks of sitting on a beach in Australia, telling Rin, '*it was our first fight*,' and the warmth of his best friend's '*welcome home*' at the airport.

Haruka recalls his small '*I'm home*,' feeling strangely shy about greeting someone he's known for more than a decade and a half. Maybe this was the start of everything. Maybe it was earlier. Haruka's not sure anymore.

"I love you." Haruka whispers again, in the nape of Makoto's neck.

Then there's nationals. Makoto's face is the first face Haruka sees right out of the water, and he remembers thinking how, in the briefest half-moment of clarity and horror and disgust, that this might be one of the last times Makoto's taking his hand like this.

And then Haruka remembers thinking in the next half of a moment, with Makoto is raising him out of the water and welcoming him back to the rest of his teammates, '*Well, there's no way I want that*.' Tokyo was nothing but an inevitability after that.

"I love you, Makoto."

Makoto's the one who's quiet now, his body shaking so hard Haruka's convinced he'll collapse right on the spot. But he doesn't. He just holds onto Haruka harder, leaning into him with everything he has before kissing him faintly, gently on the lips.

"I love you, too, Haru." Makoto says. "I really, really love you."

And with that, all the words have been said.

Chapter End Notes

Okay, so...this is officially the longest chapter, and there isn't even any smut in it!!! NOT A SINGLE TRACE!!! This one took me the longest to write too, because I really wanted to let that slow build run its course. (And to be honest I've been so sleep-deprived and busy that this has been on the back burner for a little bit. and I was dabbling with this one shot I'm also almooooost done with)

Also, I tried not to create too much conflict just for conflict's sake, but I'd like to think every couple has their "off days" once in awhile (and there's ended up perfectly fine.....) so another note!

But anyhoo, I guess I don't have much to say? It's a whole chapter based on confessions and affirmations and that's pretty much it. I wanted to place a flashback sort of chapter at some point during the story, and I thought this was the place to put it. I made my version of the "I'm going to Tokyo, too" revelation a little less dramatic just to save the build up for the very end...heh. Maybe I'm just tired. I don't know!

Anyway...music time. I went back to "Dearly Beloved" for this one, but in "Concert Paraphrase" for the dramatic high points. I also listened to "Out of the Woods" by Taylor Swift but idek if that gave me any MakoHaru inspiration tbh I just like the song. Anywaaaay....I'm outie~

if it's with you

Chapter Summary

There's a certain kind of weakness that'll make you feel like you're about to break, and then you'll want to die at the way he says your name, but it's okay. *It's okay.*

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

00:06

"Annoying."

"What? I mean, I think it's a little weird, but I guess it'd be okay."

"No. It's annoying." Haruka says, flipping over the mackerel on the grill.

"I mean...you kind of find a lot of things annoying, Haru."

Haruka looks over his shoulder, making sure no one in the other room can hear him on the phone. Some of the other underclassman from his swim team have taken the liberty to use Haruka's apartment for an Olympic-footage-watching party, but it's been three hours and they haven't managed to watch *one*. Mostly, the other boys have been watching viral cat videos on the internet and catching up on all of their serialized manga, so Haruka has taken it upon himself to abscond to the kitchen for a quick grilled mackerel, a little solitude, and a call from Makoto.

"I don't find you annoying." Haruka says, rather quietly.

"I would hope not."

"Well..."

"Well?"

"Sometimes you pull me out of the tub too early." Haruka says.

"Hey, I pull you out on time! On time!" Makoto laughs a little bit on the other end, and Haruka can't help but relinquish a small smile of his own.

"Are you still studying?" Haruka changes the subject.

"Mhm."

"And?"

"Turns out I know very little about the advanced prevention and care of athletic injuries." Haruka can hear Makoto sigh on the other end. *"I've been so stressed."* Makoto says this in a lower tone, his voice ending in a strong sigh, and Haruka makes a note of this.

"You'll be okay." Haruka says. He answers simply because it's true: it's not like Makoto ever does badly in school to begin with.

"Yeah. Anyway, so what do you want me to do? About the article?"

"Say what you want." Haruka says, accidentally letting the mackerel burn on the grill. He picks it up immediately, silently mourning the burnt skin and sliding it on top of a pyre of rice.

Haruka still doesn't understand why the local newspaper has to do a *follow-up* article, and why his coach insists that he go through with another interview. Makoto says Sasabe was the one to give the reporters his number, citing, *'they've been together since they were kids! Makoto will answer all your questions!'* and that was that.

Makoto's interview about *Mystery Boy Nanase Haruka* has been scheduled for three days from now. Haruka's attendance, although optional, has been *highly encouraged*.

But Haruka will concede this, through all of his frustrations: It's hard not to follow through on a contact when the word *together* is being thrown around. *Together* implies many things.

(And frankly, they have been together in nearly every sense of the word.)

"I mean...you didn't really say anything about yourself." Makoto says. *"And well, I could talk about you for days."*

Haruka frowns a bit when he feels the heat rush to his face. "You're being embarrassing."

Makoto just laughs on the other end. *"It's true, though."* he teases. *"Anyway, I'll be sure to say a lot of nice things. Don't worry."*

In the other room, Haruka's friends start calling for him.

"Okay, if you want." The yells of *love bite boy* don't relent. "I should go."

"Did I just hear—"

"No." Haruka interrupts. No need for Makoto to worry about anything as trivial as nicknames. He has a test to study for.

"Ah, wait, Haru...well, before you go..."

"Hm?"

"Ah, that is...um, about that..."

"About what?" Haruka asks.

On the other end, Haruka counts approximately six seconds of silence from Makoto.

"Makoto?"

"I'll...bring it up some other time." He finally says. *"It's not important."*

"It's not *important*?"

"Yeah, well, no, it is important. But it can wait." Makoto says, lightening his voice, something probably done intentionally to deflect any worry. *"I'll talk to you later, Haru."*

"Mm. Talk soon." Then comes the sound of a dead dial tone without another word from Makoto. Haruka suddenly remembers he wanted to ask Makoto to go swimming with him sometime this week, but he figures he can ask him tomorrow when he's less busy. For now, he has a bunch of rowdy athletes to entertain in his apartment.

Still, Makoto's six seconds of silence come to mind. Haruka takes note.

"Hey! Love-bite boy! We've got footage to watch!" Someone calls for him again.

Haruka takes his phone out and leaves a text for Makoto, deciding that maybe he won't have time to call him later after all.

I'm going swimming tomorrow night. Pool at 9:30.

Maybe he'll talk then.

thirty-seven

Makoto's lingering touch signals a change of seismic proportions.

"Haru," Makoto calls him out of the silence of the vacated pool hall. It's one of those few times Makoto's still in the water and Haruka's not, a very peculiar sight considering normal circumstances, but Makoto doesn't seem to notice as much as he should.

"Makoto."

In the quietness of things, where both of them are still catching their breaths from a nightly swim, Makoto just makes his way towards the wall, where Haruka's still wading his feet by the poolside. Wrapping his arms around Haruka's waist and lifting himself up for a kiss, slow and breathy, Haruka leans down to reciprocate without any hesitation. Makoto just smiles, surrenders the smallest of laughs, and starts to let go of Haruka's hips to re-descend into the water.

But before he feels Makoto completely lose his grip on him, Haruka notices something far stranger than their reversed roles in the pool: Makoto, in all quiet boldness, has let his fingers

graze Haruka's thighs a little longer than he usually would. Makoto's smile just fades right off his face not long after that, replaced with a mouth hung half-open, the light panting of his breath certainly not from anything like swimming. He blinks a couple of times at Haruka, like he realizes just what he's doing, before shutting his mouth closed tight and swallowing hard.

Usually after that, Makoto would just bury himself away in slight embarrassment for *lingering* so blatantly, but this time he just smiles with lowered, knowing eyes.

"I'm going to swim another lap." Makoto says calmly. "Are you all right here?"

"Mhm." Haruka nods. Maybe it's better that he's out of the pool first tonight. It's a better view for making observations.

Now, this is not to say that this is the first time Haruka notices Makoto's subtle shifts. In the two weeks since his first *'I love you,'* Haruka has to admit that he's been aware of it all, but he's never put enough of the pieces together to really comprehend it. As he watches Makoto cut the water and raise his arm above his head in the start of his backstroke, Haruka just thinks of all the prominent little instances of Makoto's obvious and touch-defined longing.

One time Haruka notices Makoto touching him differently, they're on a crowded train to Shibuya during peak rush hour. It is just like Makoto to get nervous about standing this close behind Haruka in such a public space, but on this particular day he coolly props Haruka up against him when the train jerks the other boy's balance backward. As Haruka regains his footing, Makoto keeps his hand on his side, with a gliding grip on his waist that holds on just a little too long. As Makoto lightens his touch until it's nothing, ever-so-slightly lifting the hem of his best friend's shirt along the way, Haruka just stares over his shoulder with the slightest curiosity.

At the time he thinks Makoto has just succumbed to the summer heat and the humidity of a packed train car, looking this flushed out of no where, but Haruka knows it as a definite sign now.

Another time Haruka picks up on it is when they're in bed together a couple of days later. Haruka is used to all of the times Makoto asks, *'is this okay?'* or *'is this all right?'* but there is little of this on this particular night. Makoto's still cautious with his touch, but it's not in a way that comes off as scared. He doesn't flinch at the touch of Haruka's bare skin anymore, *no*, in fact he's been rather generous with each agonizingly slow and thoughtful graze of his fingers, and this just makes Haruka shiver with absolute delight.

But amidst the dizziness, Haruka still takes note: Makoto is suspiciously quiet the whole time, his exhales saved for every time he meets Haruka's skin with his sighing mouth. They're both growing increasingly breathless, as they should be in a time like this, but Makoto seems even more frenzied than usual.

It's like every sigh of his urges, *hurry, hurry, hurry.*

But Haruka doesn't want to be presumptuous about things like this.

"I love you." Haruka whispers behind the cloth of his towel, releasing the biggest sigh at the thought of Makoto being so flustered. (It's a cute sight, even if he won't actively admit it.) Sometimes he sneaks the words in when he thinks Makoto won't notice. He tells himself he's still getting used to the way the muscles in his mouth form the words, and that this is the only way to get comfortable about it.

(When, in all reality, he just can't stop saying it. It's much too embarrassing to tell Makoto all the time, though, he thinks, so he resigns himself to silent mutterings.)

Haruka knows the first *I love you* would change things. His first *I love you* has led to other firsts, like their first shower together a week ago and their first admission of '*we're together*' to a *less-than-surprised* Rin on the phone, but Haruka hasn't had the time to fully gauge all of the little subtleties.

A lingering touch, a breathless stare, a hand held tighter under the table, six seconds of silence over the phone.

Haruka thinks back to what he told Makoto almost three weeks ago.

'Whenever you're ready...you can have me then.'

"Hm."

Whenever you're ready.

'Maybe —'

No, this is not the time to get excited over what might be nothing. Haruka said he'd give Makoto the time. He tells himself he is getting too worked over little signals that might not signals at all, but it's just so hard to disregard his observations. After all, he and Makoto *have* relied on these subtle gestures for almost two decades now, and a newfound discovery in verbal affirmations isn't going to change anything about their usual telepathy.

Makoto turns into a kick flip at the other side, changing into a leisurely crawl stroke to cap off what Haruka assumes is his last lap in the pool. Makoto speeds up halfway, reaching Haruka in no time, where he just hangs off the floating divider with his head hung low, trying again to catch his breath.

Haruka notes, with a curious tilt of his head, that there is a huge difference between breathing heavily from exercise and the bated breaths of someone in love.

"All good?" Makoto asks, pushing his hair back.

"Yeah." Haruka nods, admittedly transfixed at the way Makoto's even allowed to do something like *push his hair back*. He looks away for a moment, thinking he's heard someone come in, but he always forgets how creaky the pipes get in the gym. When he looks back down at Makoto, Haruka finds that he's floated over to him, resting by the wall in between Haruka's wading feet.

"Haru." He says.

"Hm?"

"I think I'm done here for the night."

"Okay." Haruka thinks it's still awkward asking, *'Your place or mine?'* so he just shrugs and looks away again. "You can..." He lets his towel slip off his head as he looks down at his knees. "You can come over. If you want to."

Or, otherwise known as, *'I want you to.'*

"I'd like that." Makoto holds his hand out to Haruka. Haruka helps him out, yanking Makoto onto to the poolside and scooting back on the concrete so Makoto has a place to sit and dry off. As he climbs out of the water, Makoto ends up knelt over Haruka altogether, their hands still held and their bodies close. Makoto is dripping wet, a rather tantalizing sight altogether for Haruka, so he wrings his arms around him and delivers a quick kiss while sitting, leaned back, under him.

Haruka just stares at him after that, blinking up to observe Makoto's changing face. That *look* of his returns, one that makes Haruka so uncomfortable in the most electrifying way: mouth hung half-open, breath escaping with a wordless *hurry*.

'Here we go.'

Makoto leans in to kiss him in all impatience, placing a hand on the back of Haruka's head and lowering him onto the floor. Haruka wraps his arms around Makoto's back, his skin still slippery in wetness and warm from the escaping heat of a finished workout.

"I tried to cool down." Makoto starts to confess with a tired little smile. "Couldn't."

"That's fine." Haruka whispers into another kiss, thinking about how heated Makoto feels again him, almost like a walking fever.

The average temperature of a human body is a balmy thirty-seven degrees celsius, capable of maintaining this constant through the coldest storms and sweltering heats. But with each gasping kiss Makoto stumbles into, with every hot breath and warm touch, Haruka makes another observation about his best friend, one that's enough to cement things into a rough and messy thesis.

This paper will dissect the meaning of Nanase Haruka's first 'I love you', primarily focusing on the effect it has on the physical desire of a boy named Tachibana Makoto. This study will examine the following:

a curious lack of words,

the lingering touch,

and the abnormalities of heightened body temperature.

Haruka's getting dizzy again, so he figures it's time to stop thinking about this sort of nonsense.

"Lay your towel down." Makoto says in between kisses. Haruka scrambles for it, laying the crumpled terry fabric under his head and going back to press his face into Makoto's.

"I...I just dried off." Haruka says with escalating sighs as Makoto nudges a leg in between his, feeling the dampness of Makoto's jammers soak onto Haruka's own skin. He really thinks it's strange, how much warmth Haruka can feel between the two of them considering their time in the water, but he'll take the combination of body heat, chlorine, and sweat all the same.

"Do you mind?" Makoto asks with a smile, although he knows *full well* what Haruka thinks about this.

Haruka doesn't say anything and lets Makoto kiss him right down his neck. He feels Makoto's fingers dig under Haruka's swimsuit, which are still slick and tight against his legs, pulling them down bit by teasing bit. Haruka raises his body just slightly, his chest pressed up right against Makoto's, so he has an easier time taking them off, but Makoto just stops midway and digs his face against Haruka's shoulder, breathless as breathless can get.

Again, Makoto doesn't say anything.

But Haruka knows what this is.

Now he's *sure* he's not being *presumptuous* about things.

With a deep breath, Haruka relaxes his body on the concrete and blinks up at the ceiling. Makoto's hands still linger on Haruka's upper thighs, shaking to get the rest of the other boy's clothes off.

"Makoto."

"Haru." he manages to say.

"You want to...don't you?" Haruka asks simply. "Is that it?"

Makoto doesn't say anything. Haruka just feels the balmy rush of Makoto's respiration against his skin, like it's actually pressing down on him with significant weight.

"Makoto." Haruka breathes out again.

"Yes." Makoto answers Haruka, wrapping his arms around his waist and hugging him tighter. He still can't look Haruka in the eye, resting his head in the cleavage of his chest.

"Ah."

"I can't hold back and...*I don't know*. I just really...want you." he continues. "*I want you*." He breathes out, like he's been waiting to say this in between all of his little silences.

It's curious, how things can change.

Haruka just closes his eyes again, tucks his head into the wrinkled fabric of the towel, before releasing his own elevated breaths and looking Makoto right in the eye.

"You can have me, then."

100%

It takes five seconds for Haruka to look for his keys in the hallway, another three to unlock the door, and six more to kick off their shoes and drop their bags. Altogether, it's been fourteen seconds, one second less than a fourth of a minute, *and nothing in the grand scheme of things*, but Haruka cannot remember the last time he's felt so impatient about anything. The walk home might as well have taken *years*, and the final fourteen seconds only another *eon* on top of that.

"Makoto." Haruka breathes out Makoto's name after the sixteenth second, the first thing either one of them has said the entire time on the walk back to Haruka's apartment. He leans back against the wall, his eyes looming up to face Makoto with breath that shouldn't be running out so *quickly* on him.

The words just pound on in his head, *hurry, hurry, hurry*, each beat in his temple threatening to black his vision out altogether.

"Haru."

Without another word, Haruka takes Makoto's hand, delicately held by the lightest grasp of their fingers, and leads him down the hallway of his apartment into his bedroom. This isn't the first time Haruka is bringing him back here like this, and this isn't the first time they've been so quiet before their own version of an *oncoming storm*, but there is just no denying the gravity of whatever is about to happen. With one hand on the knob, Haruka presses his head against the closed door of his bedroom, catching his breath once more without a word.

"Are we really doing this tonight?" Makoto asks, grabbing into his hand harder. "Are you okay with this?"

"Do you have doubts?" Haruka answers with his own question, but he only met with silence.

He counts the seconds. One, two, *three...*

"Haru."

"Yes?" Haruka asks, in all anticipation.

"I've been...*thinking*."

"And?"

"If it's with you...I have none. I have no doubts." Makoto says. "To do this, with you...it's *perfect*, really."

Perfect. Haruka knows he is far from it, and he knows, deep down, that their first time might be filled with missteps and clumsiness and embarrassed silences, but with Makoto, it's all right. They can use that word. *Perfect.*

Haruka repeats the word in his mind until he thinks he's on the verge of losing consciousness right there in the hallway. He turns around to face Makoto in the darkness, dizzy with the thought of everything about the other boy: his mouth, smiling but hung half-open, like he wants to say more but can't find the words, his eyes softened in complete reverie. His hand is still shaking, held onto Haruka's, but this is when he realizes he hasn't exactly been still, either.

Makoto's hand slides up Haruka's waist, *lingering, feeling, touching*, whatever the word is anymore, as he inches closer and closer to him for what will be, in all likelihood, the first of many kisses tonight.

"Only you." Makoto says, his voice barely audible, their foreheads touching in supreme closeness. "*Only you.*"

The past voice of Makoto's comes calling again through the night, as he presses into Haruka with the expected kiss.

It's meaningless without you, it's meaningless without you, it's meaningless without you

Haruka just fumbles for the doorknob and nearly falls back through the open doorway of his bedroom, but Makoto holds onto him and they end up bumping up against the wall in all their clumsiness. They separate from their kiss, but only for a moment to find Haruka's bed. Haruka climbs onto the sheets, pulling Makoto along and letting him hold him down on the mattress with another kiss, full of longing, their hands still held together, their legs entangling in the best kind of mess.

Makoto kisses him again, separating to peer at Haruka with his usual smile. He closes his eyes not long after, breathing another futile sigh into the other boy's neck. Makoto pushes the cotton of Haruka's shirt up his chest, yanking it off altogether and scooping Haruka's body up against his for another kiss.

They take the time to undress each other, whether it's unfastening Makoto's flannel buttons, sliding off socks, peeling off Haruka's jammers: with every new exposed bit of flesh one leans over to kiss the other in all worship, hands on hands, hands on skin. When they both get completely naked, Makoto just takes Haruka by the shoulders and brings him down on the sheets, switching between kissing him and admiring every last bit of him there is to admire, no longer worrying that he's lingering too long.

Makoto starts kissing down Haruka's body like he's making a long and winding pilgrimage, fully devoted and entranced by every beauty mark and splotch and curve. He makes his favorite stops, kissing the line of Haruka's left collarbone and circumnavigating his neck, before burying himself in the small valley of Haruka's chest and stamping kisses down his stomach.

"*Haru,*" Makoto breathes into him.

Makoto takes a sharp inhale as he inches closer towards Haruka's thighs, wrapping his arms around his legs, pushing them up and groping them with a sweeping dance of long and thick fingers. Since their explorations began, Makoto has grown to love intruding the soft skin on the innermost parts of Haruka's thighs with every kiss and small nibble, just panting '*Haru*' over and *over* again as he reaches a certain, inescapable place...

"*A-ah—*"

Haruka makes a small but audible gasp when Makoto takes him into his mouth, just a little bit at first, before settling into a fluid rhythm, slow and teasing with the sporadic flick of a tongue. Haruka feels the pressure build between his hips like none other, letting the muffled in-between of a moan and a deep exhale leave his lips. He pushes his head back on the pillow, tempted to bite down completely, but he stops himself and lets himself writhe in all breathiness, his chest heaving up and down in light summer sweat.

He knows his body is just being extra sensitive tonight, as if the words *first* and *time* combine to make some special aphrodisiac in itself, but all Haruka knows is that he won't be able to hold out much longer like this.

So, before he completely loses whatever control he has left, Haruka reaches for Makoto's wrist and scrambles to hold on to it. Makoto lifts his head from in between Haruka's thighs, leaving residual kisses on the skin of his leg on his way up.

"Are you okay?" He asks.

Haruka nods, even though he's *not*.

"Makoto..."

Haruka doesn't have to say anything else.

"Now?" Makoto breathes out, half smiling, half about to look like he's going to pass out.

Haruka nods, keeping his lowered eyes on him.

"Yes."

Without another word, Makoto just crawls right back up to kiss Haruka in all tenderness, holding onto his cheek with one hand and letting his hand sail right up the side of Haruka's body. Haruka throws his arms around Makoto and mashes his body into his in another kiss, opening his legs wider to accommodate Makoto's searching hands. In a hurry, Makoto reaches into Haruka's nightstand and finds the lubricant in the drawer, needing another moment before continuing.

"We need to..."

Makoto is probably too embarrassed to say that he's prepared for this day, and that through bouts of research, he has a decent understanding of what needs to transpire next. Haruka just closes his eyes as he hears the air escape the squeezed bottle of lube, and tries to suppress his little gasps when Makoto slowly slips his finger into him. After a bit one finger turns into

two, and then finally three, which only draws an audible moan from Haruka. He slides them in and out a little bit at first, and Haruka doesn't think it *hurts* per se, and he doesn't *hate* it, but the feeling is definitely more foreign than anything. It's new.

But then again, everything he's been experiencing with Makoto in Tokyo has been *new*. Every word, kiss, touch, and now, *this*.

"Mm..." Haruka muffles his voice with a hand to his mouth.

Makoto rescinds his fingers after a bit more movement and takes one more look at Haruka.

"It's fine." Haruka wafts his hands over Makoto's tensed shoulder blades, holding onto him and nodding in small motions. Makoto finds Haruka with quiet grace, sweeping his lips across a shoulder, up the neck, and meeting Haruka with kisses and exchanged breaths.

"*Haru*." Makoto always says the name with such softness whenever they're like this, and oddly it just makes Haruka feel small and delicate, like he's about to break. *Haru, Haru, Haru*—like the way he speaks the word itself is another version of *I love you*.

Haruka lifts himself up to kiss Makoto once more, before falling back onto the sheets to wait for the oncoming *newness*.

"*Haru*." Makoto says again, aching. With a concentrated frown and a forehead beaded in light sweat, he just seems so focused on the task at hand.

"Are you ready?"

"Yeah." Haruka nods back on the pillow, even though he's not sure he'll ever be completely ready.

But it's fine, because this is Makoto.

"Ah..."

And when Makoto does enter him, slowly, carefully, Haruka finds that it's possible to feel even smaller, maybe even *nonexistent* for a brief moment in time. He just closes his eyes to brace himself, the rush of prickling, numbing static to his legs enveloping him completely to the point where he can hardly make a sound. All he knows is this strange mix of pain and fullness and heat, but it doesn't hurt as much as he thinks it should.

He just cannot stop thinking that this is *Makoto* inside him.

Makoto looks like he's about to keel over right then and there himself, every bit of his strained face reading, '*I'm doing this with my best friend*,' a slight frown signaling that he can hardly believe this. Haruka manages to kiss him lightly with a trembling touch of his lips, just a small gesture against his cheek, to tell him this is all okay.

'If it's with you, it's all right.'

But Makoto still doesn't try to move.

"You're shaking, Haru..." Makoto manages to say in between his own stifled breaths. "Should we—"

"Go on." Haruka shakes his head in all helplessness.

"Haru."

Haruka squeezes onto Makoto's hand for a moment. His fingers feel so small wrapped around Makoto's, but they're both trembling equally.

"*Go on.*"

Makoto doesn't say anything else and just swallows the lump in his throat. He kisses Haruka once more before taking a deep breath, shifting his hips towards Haruka's body. The first thrust is barely even a thrust, it is the smallest of movements, but it makes Haruka give up a breathy little moan that just ends in a gasp. The second is a little deeper, and it just makes Haruka cock his head all the way back on the pillow in the strangest discomfort, to the point where his head is grazing the backboard. He closes his eyes with the third plunge, clenching onto Makoto hard with fingers digging into his back and a muffled moan into his pillow. Makoto just holds him close and kisses Haruka on the cheek, unable to really say much else in all of his concentration, his hand steady on Haruka's hip and the other cradling the side of his head for the utmost comfort.

"*A-ah...*"

With the fourth and fifth and sixth thrusts, Haruka decides he is too dizzy to keep further count, just locking his legs together in reflex before giving himself up to another unavoidable moan.

"*Ha...Haru...*" Makoto stammers, his voice nothing more than a whisper. He's still so focused on trying not to move too fast inside Haruka, keeping his motions controlled and slow.

And at some point, after god knows how long, Haruka thinks the pain just slips away.

Well, *no*, that's not right, exactly.

The pain doesn't go away entirely, and that's probably part of the sensation, but Haruka feels himself tense up less about it. His shoulders drop and his grip on Makoto softens, hands nearly sliding off his back with how carried away he's getting, and he realizes that there's more to feel past the initial discomfort. *Much more*. It's a heavy-hanging pleasure, threatening to fill him up and eat him alive.

When Haruka feels Makoto press into him harder—*because he's probably getting carried away too*—he just feels the pressure build even thicker between his thighs, the throbbing of Makoto inside him, and the way their bodies have begun to complement each other with every new movement. With every new thrust, Haruka hitches his body upwards into Makoto's in reflex, abdomens held together in sweat and warmth and the heaving of exhalations.

Haruka thinks he's found the rightest kind of rhythm with Makoto, whatever that can possibly mean for their first time together.

"H-ah..."

Maybe he's just *really* not thinking clearly.

Another shiver shakes his overwhelmed body, pressing the sighs out of Haruka, forcing him to feel it. Weak. He feels *weak* in all of this, being enveloped by Makoto, devoid of air and muscles spasming in rebellion, and he's not sure what to make of it all.

Bad? Good?

Good? Bad?

"Mako—ah...*ha*..." Haruka breathes into the nape of Makoto's neck, his voice withered and pleading. Haruka tears himself away from him for a moment, letting a faint gaze rise up at Makoto. The other boy just kisses away the moisture forming in the pits of Haruka's eyes, meeting his half open lips with his own.

"Ma...*koto*."

Haruka's embarrassed out of his mind, for looking like *this* in front of him, but it's the strangest thing: because as much as he wants to hide away in the nape of Makoto's neck, or under his pillow, he really, *really* can't bear to look away.

And then Haruka realizes: he has never felt this weak about anybody. In one instant it's *terrifying*, like he'll just combust from the vulnerability from being held the way he's being held, and in another instant, it's just right, that it's *Makoto* that he's losing a part of himself to.

Of course it's Makoto. If he is going to lose a part of himself, a part he's never going to get back, it *has* to be Makoto.

"Haru...I'm..." Makoto struggles to get out.

"M-Mako...to..."

Haruka can't hold out for much longer, either. As Makoto delves in deeper and harder, Haruka feels his words, all his attempts at even just saying Makoto's name, turn into jumbled incoherence. His sighs leave him like he's struggling to stay alive, the space between his hips just trembling and full of *Makoto, Makoto, Makoto*, every inch of his body just pulsing and aching and begging *it's meaningless without you it's meaningless without you it's meaningless without you*—

"A...Ah —"

With one more shuddering gasp, bodies both releasing all of their pent-up heat, Haruka feels himself collapse completely onto the mattress with Makoto following suit on top of him, both of them covered in sweat and trembles and sighs.

Haruka and Makoto just lie there for a couple of seconds, neither one of them really ready to do much talking, but the silence is fine. Haruka just tilts his head up, burying his face in the sweat-coated cove of Makoto's neck and hiding the weakest of kisses on his skin. He thinks that this could have gone so much worse for their *first time*, but he's too tired to think much farther than that.

All he knows is that this has been their version of *perfect*.

"*Haru.*" Makoto just sighs out of the quietness, pulling Haruka closer to him and rolling over onto his side.

Haruka just hides in his embrace, warm and comfortable and exhausted. Makoto has taken to tracing scribbles on the smoothness of Haruka's back, resting his head on the pillow in oncoming drowsiness and periodically delivering forehead kisses. Their legs are still tangled, and there's a mess between his thighs he shouldn't ignore, everything is covered in sweat, and his sheets are crumpled and annoyingly undone at one of the corners, but this is all something Haruka will worry about later.

For now, there's only Makoto.

"Makoto." The voice that emerges is tired and small.

"Mm?"

With another six seconds of silence—and yes, *he's counted to the best of his ability*—Haruka lets the words slip out of his mouth with the heaviest sigh.

"I love you."

And even though Haruka thinks he's hidden himself away enough, muffling his voice against the boy he's saying it to, *well*—

"I love you too, Haru."

—Makoto hears him anyway, with all the clarity in the world.

Chapter End Notes

sooooo this is the second to last chapter, and I wanted to do an obligatory first-time kind of exploration since I've covered their other first times. (it only seemed right) I think this chapter (AGAIN) is super long so my apologies. I really wanted to convey something sweet and just a little bit clumsy for their first time, along with a quiet amount of vulnerability and a spotlight on body worship. (I LOVE BODY WORSHIP if that's one thing you need to know about me)

Anyway, im also sorry my smut isn't more...explicit but I guess it wouldn't be right to do that with the tone im conveying! (Smut ins my forte, either.)

Ah...what else to say, though. I guess I really dont have much else to add. Musically, I listened to a lot of Childish Gambino and The Weeknd for the sex scene haha. And a bit of the AM album by the Arctic Monkeys. Whatever sultry music I could get my hands on...

(Also big thanks to muted CNN, as usual)

ANYHOO thanks for reading! (And really, please bother me on twitter @asplendidmoon! Let's talk MakoHaru hehe)

together

Chapter Summary

This is *Haruka and Makoto*, and that's all there is to it.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

ATHLETE PROFILE: THE EVER-ELUSIVE NANASE HARUKA

Published August 1st, 2015, 15:34 JST

Following his impressive home performance against Kindai University at a local meet almost a month ago, the word is out: Nanase Haruka is a star on the rise. And while his speed is certainly a spectacle to gleam at, it is truly his effortless form in the water that continues to stand out amongst every stroke and kick. Watching Nanase swim is, in short, a form of art, something many athletes forego for the sake of technical mastery.

"That boy's gonna be big one day." One of his coaches told us the other day. "And if he keeps watching those Olympic tapes I'm assigning, he'll be even better off."

Still, there is much we don't know about Nanase Haruka. We might know the little things, like his love for grilled mackerel and bathing, but there must be more. And since Nanase is not one to divulge much about himself, we have enlisted the help of some hometown friends to help fill in the gaps.

Hazuki Nagisa and Ryuugazaki Rei, both recent graduates of Iwatobi High School, also Nanase's alma mater, were especially ecstatic about helping us solve our ongoing mystery, but their answers were not very clear, either.

"There must have been something in Tokyo Haruka-senpai wanted to pursue. Something worth following." Ryuugazaki told us over the phone.

"Something special." Hazuki added.

As former teammates of Nanase's, maybe Hazuki and Ryuugazaki are onto something, but this still doesn't give us a clearer idea of what to look for. Nanase's parents were not available for comments, which is when we were directed to someone else for help: his longtime best friend, Tachibana Makoto, a current university student majoring in education. He was available to sit down with us one day in our office, where he gladly answered some questions for us.

"We've been around each other for most of our lives, childhood friends and all." He told us at the start of the interview.

When asked if he thought Tokyo changed the nature of their friendship, Tachibana only laughed a little, displaying a boyish charm that must make him popular with the ladies at school.

"Things change, as they do. But it's all been fine. We're fine."

Tachibana went on to tell us more about Nanase: how adept he is at cooking and drawing, that he was once co-captain of the high school swimming team, how much he enjoys the video game, *Animal Crossing: Deep Sea Edition*, and that he is very particular about the fit and feel of his swimsuits.

"Don't show him anything involving *Doomed Love in Tokyo: The Drifting Tides*, either. He hates all of those movies." Tachibana emphasized. At least we could cross that one reason for Tokyo off our list.

Still, we knew we could not let Tachibana leave the premises without having him answer the question that's all been on our minds. *Why Tokyo?* So, that's what we asked him.

Tachibana did not seem surprised by the question. In fact, another smile appeared on his face, but this time the one displayed was soft, perhaps even subdued. In the end, he did not answer the question either.

"He has his reasons. That's all."

And with that, things remain as foggy as ever.

As we continue covering Nanase Haruka's journey into the professional world of swimming, we will remain diligent in getting to know the man behind the swimmer. However, maybe this is just one question we'll never get an answer to.

8.1.2015

Haruka looks at the calendar and points to the day of their first kiss.

"That one."

"Why are you picking the day we had our *second* kiss? Is it because of the pool? Because I don't feel comfortable sharing our anniversary with *water*." Makoto remarks with a small laugh, hugging Haruka by the waist with his free arm and pulling him closer against the warmth of his body. Haruka just shakes his head and takes the invitation to lean back against him, closing his eyes and resting against the smoothness of his neck. Makoto kisses Haruka on the cheek and rubs his nose in his freshly-washed hair, and Haruka briefly wonders if Makoto can smell the mint and citrus from his shampoo.

"But it was the first." Haruka says, with a little frown.

"I thought our first kiss was in your bathroom. Like, under the curtain." Makoto counters.

He thinks back to that proposed first. Haruka remembers the lifting of fabric, the closeness of two faces, two bodies in the doorway, and an *urge* to kiss him, delivered with too much trepidation, all to the point where was no kiss to be had.

"That was an *almost* kiss." Haruka decides.

"Our lips touched though." Makoto remarks, fanning the calendar and generating a slight breeze. "It was just a little bit, but I felt it."

"I disagree." Haruka shrugs.

"Then we'll just *agree* to disagree." Makoto muses with a short little nod.

"Sounds good." Haruka reaches up to run his fingers through Makoto's still-damp hair, letting out the smallest of groans, supremely comfortable in all of his pre-sleep relaxation.

Makoto laughs. "Okay, then...how about the day you first said, *I love you*?"

"That's embarrassing." Haruka buries his face further into the nape of Makoto's neck. "So no."

"Well, what do you propose, then?" Makoto asks.

"Mm." Haruka thinks about it. "The first time seeing each other naked." He lets his hand travel from Makoto's hair to the skin on the back of Makoto's neck, grazing it softly with the gentle glide of fingers.

"And...you don't think that's embarrassing?" Makoto just laughs. "People will ask, *why that day*? I can't even imagine trying to explain that one. I think I almost cried."

"Then...first time having sex?" Haruka teases, face completely serious.

"A-Ah...no. That's not any better. Let's not." Makoto stammers, lowering his head and pecking Haruka right on the lips for such a lurid suggestion. Haruka can't help but smile a little bit as his lips meet Makoto's.

"Do we even need a day?" Haruka sighs as they separate from their kiss.

Haruka's not really sure if they can even pinpoint a day for an *anniversary*, since they've both agreed that they've been together for as long as they could remember—regardless of any *kissing* or *declarations* or *sex*. At some point during their seemingly endless history, long before coming to Tokyo, long before either one of them could even *notice* there were even any feelings to be had, Haruka and Makoto had chosen to be together, and that was that. Picking a day was just needless trouble.

And, frankly, Haruka still kind of thinks it is, but it's not like he minds that much. To be with Makoto, he will do these sorts of things.

"Hm." Makoto hums in thought, putting the calendar down and picking up the latest copy of the local newspaper, already folded to the latest *Mystery Boy* installment.

"Well, it's not like we need one, but I have to admit it's...*cute*. It's like having your birthday twice a year, don't you think?" Makoto muses, tilting his head and kissing Haruka behind the ear.

"I guess."

"I mean...it's just another reason *to celebrate being with Haru*." he continues a bit shyly, whispering into Haruka's ear.

Haruka can feel his face go red and he just snatches the newspaper away from Makoto, tempted to hit him with it altogether and leave the room for all of the sweet nothings he always ambushes him with. It makes Haruka wonder if Makoto was a poet in his past life, because there's just no other way to explain his penchant for these sorts of unexpected words.

"Embarrassing." Haruka mutters.

"Now, now." Makoto just holds onto Haruka tighter, leaning over to bury his head into the curve under Haruka's neck and hide away his laughs.

"Just pick one." Haruka sighs.

"Any day?" Makoto asks. "Is that really okay?"

"M-hm."

Makoto looks back up and points to the publication date of "*Athlete Profile: The Ever-Elusive Nanase Haruka*."

"How about August first, then? Today?"

Haruka shrugs. "Today is fine."

"Good."

"*Good?*" Haruka asks.

"That means we don't have to wait a year."

Makoto leans over to kiss Haruka once more, taking the paper out of his hands and tossing it away. They interlace fingers and Makoto lowers Haruka onto the sheets, laughing softly into each and every subsequent kiss he tries to initiate. Haruka reciprocates with zero objections, satisfied with whatever day Makoto ends up choosing. It doesn't matter if it's in the middle of summer like this, or under the heaviest covers in a day in December, or during a sneezing fit in the spring, because, regardless of any established date, Haruka will find a reason to be thankful for someone like Makoto.

As Haruka finishes latching the last button on Makoto's just-ironed dress shirt, he cannot help but think how good his best friend looks in light blue. Haruka presses down the fabric across Makoto's shoulders and flicks away a stray thread before nodding his head in approval.

"Thanks, Haru." Makoto sighs. "I really should learn how to iron my own shirts, shouldn't I?"

Haruka scoffs just the slightest bit. "You might burn them."

"Hey, now." Makoto laughs. He looks down at his new work attire. Tomorrow is Makoto's first day as a barista in one of the upper scale cafés in Ginza, where the required uniform is a *pristinely pressed* light blue dress shirt and fitted navy colored slacks, and he has decided to go through a much-needed practice run. Makoto has had absolutely *no* experience in the service industry before, and the past few days have been about reading various coffee maker manuals and watching online tutorials on '*how to make the perfect vanilla cappuccino*.'

(And the answer is no, he cannot make the *perfect vanilla cappuccino*.)

As Makoto recites the components of a basic latte to himself for the hundredth time (and getting the parts wrong *again*) Haruka's pretty sure that they've only hired Makoto because he's, well, *attractive*, to put things bluntly.

Not to mention tall.

'Tall.'

Haruka steps back to take a better look at him, wrinkling his nose in a slight frown.

"Oh, no." Makoto sighs. "Does it really look that bad?" His eyes widen slightly.

Haruka shakes his head. "No." *'That's not it.'* He marches right back up to Makoto and stands across from him, toe to toe. Haruka looks up and Makoto looks down a bit to face Haruka.

"Do you...want a kiss?" Makoto asks, in slight confusion.

"Height?" Haruka asks right back.

"What?"

"Your height."

"What is this, all of a sudden?" Makoto frowns a bit.

"Just tell me."

Makoto tilts his head to the side. "Um, last time I checked...one-hundred eighty-three centimeters?"

"No." Haruka shakes his head. "I don't think so."

"What, have I *shrunk*?" Makoto asks jokingly.

"You're taller than that."

"*Taller?* No...I mean, *maybe* just a bit since we've moved here, but it's not that noticeable."

Haruka looms even closer and traces the bit of skin still peeking out of his dress shirt. No one here in Tokyo would notice a couple of extra centimeters on Makoto, but Haruka can't help *but* notice. It's not a *bad* thing, though. It might have been a little off-putting when they were both still growing and Haruka was just a little bit taller (there is a sort of blow to the ego when someone outgrows you, even if it's out of childish pettiness) but this has been the norm for a while now.

'*Tall.*'

"Hm."

Slowly, Haruka unfastens the first button on Makoto's shirt and looks up at Makoto rather innocently.

No, Makoto being tall isn't a bad thing. It's not annoying, or off-putting, either. As Haruka undoes another button, and then *another*, Makoto just looks down with mouth slightly agape. Haruka can make out the heaving of his chest through the light blue fabric.

"So...do you want that kiss now?" Makoto asks with a breathy little laugh, trying to keep composure.

Without a word, Haruka just takes his eyes off of him and unfastens one more button.

"I'm going to take that as a yes." With a delicate nudge of his hand under Haruka's chin, he tips his head upward towards his lips and lays down the first of many kisses for the evening. And as their clothes start to come off and end up on the floor, Haruka tells himself he'll just iron the dress shirt again when he gets the chance.

06:26:45

In one of those rare mornings where Haruka wakes up before his alarm, he peels himself off of Makoto, fumbles for his phone on the nightstand, and shuts it off altogether.

"Mm...*Haru*..."

And unfortunately, in one of those rare mornings where Haruka has woken up before his alarm, he has inadvertently caused Makoto to do the same.

"Go back to sleep." Haruka hovers over Makoto, brushing his lips over his forehead and falling back onto his own pillow next to him. Makoto opens his eyes in a daze, exhaling deeply and offering Haruka a restful little smile, stretching his arms out from under the covers and taking Haruka into a warm, *good morning* hug.

"I'm awake." Makoto yawns again, groaning just a bit. "Good morning."

"Morning." Haruka says back, leaning in to kiss the tip of Makoto's nose.

"You're not complaining about your alarm today." Makoto observes.

"Mm?"

"Usually it's *turn it off, turn it off*." Makoto teases in a small voice, and Haruka's not even sure how he even has the energy in him to *tease* so early in the morning.

"Quiet. Go back to sleep." Haruka frowns, rolling onto his other side and facing away from Makoto, but it doesn't take long for the other boy to wring his arms loosely around Haruka's waist and pull him close against his. Makoto initiates a series of soft neck kisses from behind, a quiet little *sorry* for agitating Haruka's usual morning grogginess, and Haruka just turns back over, facing Makoto to kiss him back.

'It's okay.' Haruka meets Makoto again by the lips, tossing his arms over his shoulders, both of them breathing out every last remaining yawn from their systems into each other. Makoto glides his hand over Haruka's cheek and presses into him again, his lips just a little less focused from the remaining drowsiness, but Haruka will take it all the same. He's not really the type to reject a lazy morning makeout, even if it means missing some extra time in the bath.

"Haru...what time is it?" Makoto asks in between kisses.

"Ah..." Haruka kisses him once more before he has to answer. "Almost six thirty."

"Six thirty?" Makoto stops. "Our alarm goes off at seven forty-five."

"Then go back to sleep." Haruka says bluntly, still laying his kisses on the corners of Makoto's lips.

"I guess I could." Makoto keeps his face close to Haruka's, coming closer and closer until the tip of their noses are touching. "Sleep...sounds good." He closes his eyes, and then Haruka lets himself do the same, but *sleep* is not to be had. Their eyelids don't flutter in anticipation of falling back into slumber, but in another kiss, an early morning meeting of two boys blessed with a little extra time on their hands.

In short, it is one of those rare mornings where no one longs for more sleep.

Makoto climbs on top of Haruka and leans over to breathe more kisses into him, letting his lips stick to Haruka's in all blatant lingering before letting the touch of them fade away. He tosses the blankets away, exposing Haruka's naked skin to the slight nippiness of a drafty bedroom in early autumn, but Makoto takes the time to brush away every forming goose bump and scare away any uncomfortable shiver with the warmth of his traveling hands.

"Mm." Haruka mouths with a tremble.

And this is when Haruka remembers that goosebumps and uncomfortable shivers will happen regardless, whether or not there's a draft in the room.

"Sorry," Makoto apologizes with a small laugh. "It's kinda cold, isn't it?" He looks down at both of their naked bodies, probably thinking, '*we should probably put some clothes on,*' but that is the last thing Haruka wants to do.

"It's okay." A little chill never hurt anyone.

Haruka lifts himself up for another kiss, and Makoto doesn't waste any time in reciprocating. And after another countless amount of kisses, Haruka tears away for a moment, just to take a look at Makoto in this different sort of light, because they've been like this in the afternoons, at dusk, during evenings and long nights, but never in the morning with this hazy and all-encompassing illumination. Makoto's face forms into a gentle smile and a bit of a laugh, an expression asking in all clueless levity, '*what are you looking at?*'

"Good morning, Haru." He says to him again. Haruka is too busy noticing how much Makoto belongs in this kind of light to really say anything else.

In the rain, Haruka had once observed that being around Makoto was like having the sun on his face. In the warmth of all current things, Haruka just closes his eyes as Makoto leans in for another kiss, brushing his lips against the surface of a reddened cheek.

"Good morning." Haruka finally says, a trailing whisper at the end of another kiss.

Makoto sighs, smile fading just a little as he lets his eyes linger all over Haruka. That small, fleeting frown is something Haruka notices right away, even if no one else in this city ever would.

Haruka takes his hand and waits for him to speak.

"I..." Makoto shakes his head, not knowing how to proceed. *Speechless* is the word.

Haruka blinks up at him.

"You're really beautiful, Haru." Makoto says, in all quietness. "And I know you're just going to say how embarrassing I'm being, but it's the truth."

It seems the morning has the strangest effect on both of them. Things look just a little too honest in the morning light.

"Ah." Haruka breathes out, feeling a strange little lump form in his throat. It is much too early for any of this, he thinks, but it's not like he really minds. He looks away in well, *embarrassment*, but he finds it is one of those rare mornings where he doesn't have the heart to scold Makoto for it, as he usually would.

Makoto says the word again, *beautiful*, and Haruka feels like dying right then and there.

And with every new kiss, touch of skin, and shift of the sheets the two of them can manage for the next hour and forty-five minutes, Haruka notices that the feeling of the sun on his face never really fades away.

12:02

On the days Haruka and Makoto aren't together in person, the latter usually sends the same text at twelve o' clock, give or take a few minutes:

How's your day going?

Today is no exception, with Makoto's text clocking in at 12:02 PM.

Haruka excuses himself from the table where's sitting with the rest of his teammates. Just like the *days of old* in Iwatobi, the other swimmers have taken it upon themselves to invite everyone over to Haruka's apartment, excited to dive into multiple rounds of *the-start-of-autumn* hot pot and other various snacks from the nearby supermarket.

"Ah, texting someone, *love bite boy?*" One of them snickers.

"If it's not his *lover*, then it's no one." Someone else says. "Because Nanase never responds to my texts!"

Haruka shrugs, tapping on the cell phone keyboard and looking over his shoulder. "I responded for lunch." he counters.

"Yeah, like *two hours later*. Might as well have been for dinner." the others start laughing and begin unearthing their treasures from plastic grocery bags, while Haruka just ambles into the kitchen without another word.

I'm okay. I have friends over. Haruka texts Makoto back, three minutes later at 12:05 PM. **You?**

Then he adds, **Someone said they liked mackerel and pineapple too.** This is probably one of the longer text messages he's ever sent, but he'll expend this sort of energy if he can't be with Makoto in person. After all, he's always asking, '*oh, how are you liking your teammates?*' and '*are you getting along well with them?*' so Haruka figures he should keep Makoto informed from time to time, if only to ease his worries. And really, Haruka thinks he has nothing to worry about in the first place. Because despite how rowdy his teammates can get, and how often they're beginning to barge into his apartment like they *own* the place, Haruka can't say he minds all this company too much, or any these new *friends*, at least in moderate doses.

While Haruka fidgets with the stray magnets on his refrigerator, it takes about a minute for Makoto to text back.

I'm fine! Suffering in the library ha ha...but that's amazing. You should eat that with them.

Haruka just scoffs a little bit. **No, you should eat that with me.**

Makoto responds not thirty seconds after. **Ah, I think I'll pass.**

Fine, Haruka texts back. He thinks, *one day*, he'll get Makoto to try it.

Another ping sounds from Haruka's phone another minute later.

I do miss you, though. Dinner? I'm craving ramen.

Haruka hides his smile behind his phone, stifling it before a couple of his running mates come in to start chopping vegetables. They eye Haruka suspiciously, mouthing *love bite boy* and holding up their own phones to make kissing gestures at their screens. Haruka just frowns at all of them, partly in disgust, partly in pure, unadulterated annoyance, and just joins them in chopping up vegetables. He doubts any of them even *know* how to properly chop vegetables.

But before he does, he responds back to Makoto.

Ramen sounds good.

See you later.

And it another move that's sure to surprise the *ever-loving wits* out of Makoto, Haruka also sends him a heart emoticon to go with it.

six

Although everyone knows it by now, no one makes mention of the union that is *Haruka and Makoto*.

"Say, Mako-chan, are you sick of those kids yet?" Nagisa asks cheekily, propping an eager little hand under his chin and letting the noodles slide off his chopsticks with the other.

"That is honestly such a rude question to ask him." Rei just rolls his eyes and neatly cuts his pork chop. "I'm sure Makoto-senpai is doing just fine."

"It *can* be a challenge at times, but I'm enjoying myself." Makoto laughs, tearing his gaze from the photo album Nagisa has brought back from Iwatobi. Haruka just leans over in his seat next to Makoto to get a closer look at all the various pictures Nagisa's kept over the years, posed group shots and other candids ranging from elementary school to graduation. He can't help but frown at the picture of him sleeping with his favorite mackerel pillow on one of the pages, but he figures there's no use in complaining now.

Peering back down at the album, Makoto sneaks a small smile at Haruka, eyes lowered for just a moment. *'I think that's a cute picture of you,'* he's probably thinking.

And Haruka just stares back, blankly, batting his eyes just once. *'Shut up.'*

The four of them have reunited again, not as teammates, but more-than-occasional dinner dates, considering the fact that Nagisa and Rei have also chosen to attend colleges here in the city, too. Neither one of them have forayed into the world of professional swimming, but Rei seems satisfied enough studying physics while Nagisa has coined himself as *happily undecided*.

(Though he seems to have taken a rather keen interest in an eclectic mix of art history and marine biology, as of late. Or was it zoology? Haruka doesn't remember.)

"So...you two are fine, then, huh?" Nagisa asks next, keeping that clever little look on his face.

Makoto's smile doesn't waver. "Yeah."

"Still hanging out a lot, huh?"

"Uh...yeah." Makoto answers again, letting out a nervous laugh.

It's always like this. No one ever really asks about the two of them *head on* out of politeness, but the implications are still enough to make Haruka squirm all the same. As Nagisa's eyes dart left and right, first at Haruka then Makoto then Haruka again, Haruka just feels like burying his head behind the photo album forever. Makoto senses his ill-ease and hands him the photo album casually, placing it on Haruka's lap and smiling out at the rest of the table.

"So, Rei, how are you enjoying the physics classes at school? My friends always complained about them last semester." Makoto always knows how to change the subject seamlessly.

Rei lights up at the question. "*Well*, I've embarked on this *amazing* research proposal which pinpoints the perfect material and design for the perfect woman's swimsuit, and I'm sure I'm close to perfecting the preliminary lab work for it..." Haruka just lets Rei's voice trail on as the other boys nod along in all confusion.

Haruka flips through the album, page by page, finding snapshots of the expected moments: their three relays, their time on the island training camp, their graduations, their reunions. As expected of Nagisa, he's captured the lightest moments, as if he's sought out to create an album that exemplifies *joy* itself, and it's something Haruka can appreciate.

"You like my *memory book*, Haru-chan?" Nagisa asks. "I worked really hard on it!"

"Mhm." Haruka says with a small smile.

However, as Haruka flips each page, he can't help but take extra notice of the photos with Makoto. Haruka remembers most of these moments, a sleepover here, a festival there, but it never hurts to see him in new perspectives. He takes notice of five pictures altogether, taking just a little too long to look at each of them:

Haruka and Makoto can't be more than six years old in one of these snapshots. Makoto is just about Haruka's height, hugging his best friend with their cheeks smushed together. He's not even really sure how Nagisa even *got* this particular photo, but that's not something Haruka feels like deducing. All Haruka notices is how *happy* Makoto looks, while Haruka just looks un-amused. (Haruka will tell himself he was secretly happy too, though, even if his childish scowl says otherwise.)

Another picture he takes notice of is Makoto with Rin from one of their days at the old swim club. It's a candid, with both of them in the middle of a conversation about something Haruka

obviously can't guess at. On the corner of the photo is the date, *June 28th*, though, so maybe he *can* guess at it. Haruka can imagine the scene now, with a younger Makoto emphasizing, *'you know, it's Haru's birthday soon! Let's make it special!'*

Makoto leans over as Haruka flips the page. "Hey, *wait*. Why are there so many of me without a shirt on?"

"Well...we *were* swimmers, Makoto-senpai." Rei answers.

"You know what I mean."

"But *Haru-chan's* not complaining." Nagisa observes under his breath.

"Hm."

Haruka can't find a reason *to* complain. Three of the next photos are just *gratuitous*, really, with all of them featuring Makoto by the poolside. In one picture, he's in the middle of taking off his training jacket, and in another, his bare back is the focus of the snapshot, every sculpted curve saying *hello*. Makoto is on the verge of grabbing the book back from Haruka in all stammering bashfulness, when he spots the next picture of him *flexing* for a muscle contest Haruka almost forgot he once entered.

And with that, Haruka can't help but actually *laugh*, even if it's just a little bit.

"Haruka-senpai!"

"Haru-chan! You laughed!"

"Haru..." Makoto just lowers his head into his hands in all eternal embarrassment.

Haruka continues laughing just a little bit, until he flips the page and spots a familiar pink hue in one of the prints. The smile doesn't quite fade off of his face, but he has to admit how bewildered he is at the sight of this particular sunset.

"Oh no, he found the picture." Nagisa whispers.

"I couldn't help but take it...the scene was just right..." Rei whispers back.

It's from the last time Haruka and Makoto were in Iwatobi, under the setting sun on the sidewalk by the beach. Haruka's back is to the lens, toes slightly raised in a kiss. Makoto's smiling as he's leaning over to meet Haruka, and their hands look so delicately held together, palms pressed and fingers interlaced.

"I mean, you two look *kinda* perfect together." Nagisa says, in all seriousness.

And Haruka cannot help but think, in all vanity and a strange sense of pride, with cheeks reddening and chest swelling, that the two of them *really do* look perfect together. He's just never gotten to see it in this perspective before. Of all the pictures, Haruka can't take his eyes off this one, *it's not even just lingering, he's full-on staring*, and he's not really sure if he's

even going to let Nagisa get away with keeping it at all. Haruka wants to say something about it, but he opens his mouth only to find empty air. *Speechless* is the word for it.

In all of Haruka's indecision, Makoto's hand finds his under the table.

"Thank you." Makoto says, to both Nagisa and Rei. "It's a great picture."

Eyes dart between the two of them again, *Haruka to Makoto, Makoto to Haruka*.

And this is when he realizes.

No one might make *mention* of the union that is *Haruka and Makoto*, but everything else, it seems, is plain to see.

¥600

Haruka thinks paying six hundred yen for a cup of *plain black coffee* is ridiculous, but no one sitting at the counter seems to be complaining. Haruka is sitting by himself at a table near the window, sipping at his free cup of tea while watching Makoto work a shift for the first time since he's started working here. It's fairly busy this afternoon, due to the fact that the autumn chill is really making it's way into the city (which really makes people clamor for hot, flavored beverages, it seems) but there's also one other thing to take into account for this cafe's popularity on this particular day: *Tachibana Makoto is the current barista*.

"Ah, ma'am, did you order the shortbread? I think we're out of that..." Makoto tells a girl at the counter.

He keeps looking back at Haruka, his face strained in a slight frown and the most incredulous smile, in an expression that most-definitely reads *'Please help me, Haru.'*

But what Makoto does not realize, regardless of the lukewarm coffee he makes, or the deficit of pastries the cafe might have today, is that no one will care, regardless.

The customers sitting at the counter are here for what they call *the perfect view*.

High school girls, high school boys, old ladies, the other serving girls and busboys—it's all amazing how much some people can shamelessly ogle.

As Haruka finishes up the last of his tea, he brings the mug back up to the front counter and ducks underneath the divider to join the barista. Haruka unzips his jacket to reveal a light blue dress shirt, keeping his face rather blank and nodding once, a gesture for, *'You'll be fine.'*

"Just for today." He tells Makoto. "Where's the cappuccino maker?"

Haruka would never even *think* to work in a place that sells a small black cup of coffee for six-hundred yen, but he doesn't mind helping Makoto just this once.

11.17.2015, 23:00 JST

With an hour left in Makoto's birthday, Haruka takes him by the light grasp of the fingers and leads him away in quiet steps, all to ensure that no one's heard them leave. The unspoken agreement was forged, *him taking Makoto away like this*, when Haruka saw the first set of lowered eyes from across a loud and crowded karaoke lounge.

"Let's go." Haruka says, as they step out onto the street, breath forming small clouds in the cold.

Because even though Makoto enjoys people and company and socializing well enough, much more than Haruka ever will, there's also a point where he gets tired at these events, too. With sighs heaved heavier than usual, with lowered eyes in all dreaminess, and listless nodding for conversation he *sincerely* means to pay attention to, Makoto secretly signals to Haruka, mostly unintentionally, *you know, I'd like to go home now*.

And usually, when he means, *I'd like to go home now*, he also wants to take Haruka with him. He's just too polite to say it though, so Haruka's always the first one to take his hand in these circumstances.

"Bye, Mako-chan! Happy birthday!" Nagisa calls from down the street.

"Have a good night!" Another friend, gap-toothed boy, yells afterwards.

"Thanks again!" Makoto says, mustering a voice that's slightly raised so they'll hear him. He manages to catch up to Haruka, so they're walking side by side on the road, hands still held together like usual, with the knit fabric of gloves separating them from the real touch of skin. Makoto hums out a sigh, and Haruka just watches his breath form and dissipate in the cold air.

There's a comfortable silence between the two of them, which is something to be expected: Haruka notices that these jump-scare surprise parties take the energy out of everyone involved, whether you're keeping the surprise a secret or you're the one *getting* surprised.

"That was fun." Makoto muses, looking out to the night sky. "Thanks for everything, Haru."

Haru shrugs. "It was nothing."

Makoto just smiles over at Haruka, suppressing a small laugh like he wants to respond with, *'of course you'd say that,'* but he doesn't.

"Well." Haruka says.

"Well?" Makoto asks.

"That was just part of it." Haruka adds.

Haruka stops right on the sidewalk and digs into his bag, producing a plain envelope with Makoto's name printed in the middle. He looks down at it for a moment, holding it for three terrified seconds' worth of telling himself, *'come on, it's just Makoto,'* before taking a deep

breath and passing it over into the other boy's grasp. Makoto doesn't open it right away, though, just looking back up at Haruka with a soft smile.

"Open it." Haruka breathes out.

"You know, Haru, you've already given me so much today, another gift...is..." His voice trails off when he pulls out the card in the envelope, finding a key taped to the front of it.

Surprise.

Written under the little piece of metal, in Haruka's handwriting, is '*Makoto's key.*'

"This is..."

Haruka looks to the side. "It's...only if you want to."

"*Haru...you...*" Makoto can't even bring himself to finish his sentence. "You want me to...?"

"Move in." Haruka finishes for him, nodding along. "...with me."

Haruka finds it in himself to tear his gaze off from the floor, only to have Makoto engulf him with an embrace in that same instance. Makoto's leaning over, nodding repeatedly with his face pressed in Haruka's shoulder, and Haruka just raises his arms to hug him back. Haruka swears that Makoto might actually be crying about this, but he doesn't say anything about it. He just holds him a little bit longer, his own knees shaking under him.

'*With me.*' Haruka has never imagined that he'd be so presumptuous about things like this.

'*With me.*' He says in all ringing honesty, barring the useless little excuses about saving money, or not liking Makoto's roommate, or needing someone to help with rent.

'*With me.*' Because, *well*, it's the truth.

He just wants to come home to Makoto, he wants Makoto to come home to him.

"*Haru...*" Makoto finds it in himself to say.

This shouldn't be such a big deal, because Makoto usually ends up in Haruka's bed by the end of the day anyway, but Haruka knows, despite all the silly conventions of *titles* and *declarations* and *anniversaries*, that moving in together, *officially*, is one of those milestones he can't just gloss over.

And it's amazing, how many of those *milestones* they've had this year.

But he doesn't have the energy to get so philosophical about the nature of relationships. For now, in the deepening autumn and the last hour of Makoto's birthday, Haruka just holds onto his best friend a little tighter.

"Happy birthday, Makoto."

01-01

Even as the previous year comes to a close and a new one begins, Haruka and Makoto will still be capable of playing their little games.

"A-ah...*ha*..."

It's always strange, Haruka observes, because it's not like they ever really play at the same time, nor do they ever play the same game. Although they *are* both about stealth (Haruka with his mission to find beauty marks, Makoto with his unexpected sweet nothings) it hardly ever cumulates in, well, *this*. They didn't even make it onto the bed this time.

"Haru..."

Haruka thinks it's Makoto's fault, for saying things like, "*I love you in that shirt.*"

But then Makoto probably thinks it's Haruka's fault for hugging him to the floor, all just to start another game of *kiss the beauty marks*.

All Haruka really knows, though, is that neither one of them felt like unpacking at the time, and that they *definitely* do not feel like unpacking now. It has already taken Makoto almost a month and a half to actually get his things into the apartment, so Haruka figures they can wait a little bit longer to really settle in.

"Mm..."

With Haruka lying on the floor, the beloved *red plaid shirt* open and clinging onto him with nothing else, Makoto pushes another moving box aside carelessly and kisses Haruka lightly on the lips, sliding his fingers up and down the side of Haruka's body while pressing into him harder. In a last ditch effort to retain a *semblance* of control, he grabs onto Makoto's wrists, but each new movement inside him just leaves him too disoriented to keep a hold onto anything. Even in the deadest part of winter, the light sweat forms regardless, and each touch between the two of them, chest on chest, thigh on thigh, *skin on skin*, feels like the pervading heat of summer.

"Ah—*Makoto*..." Haruka tries not to be too loud with his next moan, but he can't help but let them escape with every time Makoto comes after him the way he does. Makoto just leans over to kiss Haruka again, letting his lips linger near his afterwards, their foreheads kept close. Makoto lets his hand travel up to the collar of the red plaid shirt, tugging at the fabric and shaking his head in all exasperation. A conceding smile forms on his face as he continues to move inside Haruka from there. Haruka only peers up at him in all dazed confusion.

"You wearing this...shouldn't be allowed." Makoto manages to say. "*Really*," he breathes out.

Haruka just tosses his head back in another panting sigh, too occupied to really give a response.

But, in all of his Makoto-induced daze, Haruka thinks of a new game for the new year, and it's a rather simple one, really, even if it's less *covert* than the others the two are prone to playing.

Wear the red plaid shirt.

(And possibly nothing else underneath.)

The rest will take care of itself.

fourteen

"Have a safe trip, okay?" Hands refuse to let go.

"Mhm." And their next kiss is lingering and already full of longing.

With one foot already out in the hallway and a rolling suitcase at his side, Haruka leans over to kiss Makoto again in the doorway of their apartment, another small apology for having to leave him for two dreadful weeks in a training facility in Fukuoka. Haruka is tempted to just tell Makoto to go back to bed, because it *is* five in the morning, but he has braved through every shaky yawn and bout of drowsiness to stand here with Haruka, all just for the most temporary of goodbyes. Haruka wants to say, *'I'll only be gone for two weeks,'* and *'this is nothing,'* but he knows it's useless to offer these sorts of reassurances.

Because, in the end, Makoto will still end up saying, *'I know, but I'll miss you anyway.'*

And Haruka will be forced to say, in all honest reluctance, *'I'll miss you, too.'*

"Are you sure you don't want me to come to the airport with you?" Makoto asks. "I'll just throw on my coat and—"

"No." Haruka says, because they both know Makoto shouldn't miss the first lecture of the new semester. "I'll call you."

"Really, I could just..."

"Makoto." Haruka says. *"I'll call you."*

Makoto just leans over to peck Haruka on the lips again. "Okay." he concedes. "Please do."

"Because I know you worry."

"Because you know I worry." Makoto repeats back and smiles into the next kiss. He pulls Haruka closer to him, arms wrapped around his waist, as Haruka just throws his arms over him. They stay quiet like this for just a moment, foreheads touching for the smallest of moments, before Haruka unlatches himself from Makoto and offers a hint of a smile, fleeting and conciliatory, before letting it fade right off his face. He wishes he didn't have to leave

Makoto alone in the apartment after only a month's worth of living together, but he knows things like this can't be helped.

Makoto just kisses him on the forehead, a gesture for, *'It's okay,'* but Haruka doesn't take much comfort in it.

"Time to go." Makoto tells him. "Don't miss your flight."

"Okay."

Two weeks. Fourteen days.

'It's only fourteen days.'

He'll be back soon enough.

As he gives Makoto one more kiss for the road and lets go of his hand, Haruka wonders if this is what being in love is: missing someone before you've really gone anywhere at all.

18:19

"How does the sky even get this pink?"

"Who knows."

Some questions require just a bit too much thought, and Haruka's much too comfortable to find any answers.

With shoes off and feet dawdling in the sand, Haruka and Makoto can always find a bit of peace along the curb by the sea. The breeze still stings a little bit with the fading sun, the last remnant of a winter that's trying to keep its grasp, but Haruka doesn't mind it all too much. He takes in the smell of saltwater and lets the wind waft behind his ears, letting his fingers creep over Makoto's on the concrete and the haze of the pink sky lull him into a half-slumber. He leans his head against Makoto's shoulder and closes his eyes, content with distant sound of seagulls, the slightest mist of crashing waves, and everything else Iwatobi can hope to offer them.

After a particularly difficult set of five days consisting of extra-long coffee shop shifts, new training regiments, lectures, coursework, negligent landlords, and busted ovens, it has been a much needed weekend away from Tokyo, for the both of them.

"You know, I have to admit, I was getting a bit homesick." Makoto says. "Remember Nagisa's photo album? I think that really did it for me."

"That was months ago." Haruka observes.

Makoto laughs. "Well, I've had my distractions since then." He kisses Haruka on the side of the head.

Haruka just shrugs a bit, too tired to fight off Makoto's sweet nothings today. He just nuzzles his head a little more into the fabric of Makoto's hoodie, making himself extra comfortable.

"Hey, Haru."

"Makoto." Haruka mumbles.

"You know, lately, I've been thinking about a lot of things." Makoto says.

"M-hm." Haruka can't say he *hasn't* noticed. Now that they actually live together, he gets to observe even the smallest glimpses of Makoto in random bouts of thought and contemplation. Lately, Makoto has been prone to staring out the window when he thinks Haruka isn't looking, out at the city and the streets below, as if he's looking for something in particular, but he never says a word about it.

And then, when Makoto knows he's been caught, he just returns his gaze back to Haruka, with a couple of blinks in silence, a small moment to catch up with his surroundings, before smiling at Haruka as usual.

"And there's something I've been asking myself." Makoto continues.

Haruka faces him to hear the question.

"I mean...I've thought about kissing you here before. In Iwatobi. It's funny, I mean, I didn't *know* it was even a matter of kissing you, or...wanting you, or *loving* you. It was just something that was always there, though." Makoto explains. "Because you're always there, Haru."

Haruka nods along, because there's no other way he would put it. Of course Makoto would be the one to find the words. *Always there*. Haruka's not even sure what '*always there*' even means. Is it the fact that they're *physically* close, sharing an apartment and a bed? Does it concern the mind, because Haruka's lingers a little too long on Makoto, and vice versa?

Or is it the matter of the heart? Because someone once told him, '*it's like your hearts are connected*.'

Haruka's not sure how to explain the constant state of '*always there*.'

"So it just makes me think...why didn't I kiss you back then?" Makoto asks.

Out of all the questions people tend to ask, like '*why is the sky blue?*' (or pink, for that matter, in Makoto's case) Haruka doesn't have to think too hard about answering this one.

"We just didn't." Haruka says simply, looking back out at the last peak of sun.

But this doesn't mean they weren't together. No, on the contrary: they've *always* been together, and this year has certainly been a little more different than the past, but all in all, everything still remains. They're *together*, and they will continue to be *together*. All the little pieces, the confessing, the handholding, the kissing, the lovemaking, that all comes as garnishes, ornaments, extra stars in a sky already *littered* with a universe of them.

Together is what brought Haruka to Tokyo.

Together, at the core of things, is what they've always been.

Makoto looks a little surprised at Haruka's answer at first, before he understands. There's no doubt he does. With that, he just lets his shoulders drop in a giant sigh, smiling out at the horizon.

"We are what we are, huh?" Makoto laughs.

Haruka just brings his hands up to Makoto's face, hiding a kiss on his cheek behind the delicate grip of his fingers.

And, well, that alone should be enough of an answer for him.

two

Sometimes Haruka will walk in the rain without an umbrella, just because of how different the water can feel on his skin. It's something he's done before in Iwatobi, always along the edge of the curb with the sea beside him, but in Tokyo, Makoto only scolds him to get back under before he catches a cold. Catching the glimpse of a grey sky underneath the green-colored vinyl of Makoto's umbrella, Haruka only holds out his hand to collect the rain of the early summer.

"Feeling the water again?" Makoto asks, as they walk on down the block, *left, right, left, right*, their feet splashing along in perfect unison.

"Yeah." Haruka answers him simply.

"Because it's *different*?" Makoto laughs a little.

Haruka just nods, taking Makoto's hand into his and holding on lightly. It's one of those days where he lets Makoto lead him along just by a little, really only by a couple of centimeters on the block, since he is more suited to the *excuse me's* and the quick apologies a bustling city usually warrants. Makoto sighs a little, looking out side to side while crossing the street, and Haruka can't help but notice how full of these exhalations he's been.

And for once, despite all of his efforts at guessing, Haruka doesn't get why.

Haruka isn't really even sure where the two of them are going this afternoon, and he's not completely convinced Makoto knows his directions either, but he doesn't really mind getting lost. He thinks, as inconvenient as getting lost might be, that it's just a little more alone time with Makoto.

As they walk on, the rattle of heavy rain pounds on against the umbrella made for two.

"Ah, it's really pouring." Makoto observes.

"M-hm."

Haruka just shakes his hand free of all the water pooling in the curve of his palm and huddles a little bit closer to Makoto under the umbrella. In all honestly, this is the type of downpour Haruka *really* likes to jump into, with each drop of cool moisture pelting his skin, but he's content with walking alongside Makoto.

Well, no, that's not it. It's much more than about being *content*. He stays under the umbrella because he gets to be with Makoto.

To be with Makoto, Haruka will refrain from walking in the rain, because he knows how much his best friend worries about him getting sick. To be with Makoto, he will endure any busy day he might miss being with him, and he will put up with any coffee shop ogler and errant love confession. To be with Makoto, he will share the space in his bed, kiss him in the hallway before long trips, and make sure to kiss him goodnight when he returns. To be with Makoto, he'll try not to get too annoyed when people indirectly ask, '*so, are you two together?*' and make sure to steal and save every candid anyone might snap of them. And to be with Makoto, here in this city of approximately 13,189,000 people, Haruka thinks he'll start believing in what they call *luck*, because there's just no way to account for all the good fortune he's had here in Tokyo.

To be with Makoto, Haruka will do a lot of things.

And as Makoto steals him away into an alleyway, so the two of them can avoid the bumping of shoulders and the crashing of umbrellas amongst all the others, just as a small, but much-needed reprieve, Haruka's head conjures up a thought.

He's the only one who gets to stand here, like this, toe to toe with him, in their world alone.

No one else gets to kiss Makoto good morning. No one else gets to give him a key to his apartment, or button up his dress shirts, or walk him home with hands so lightly held. No one else gets to pick an anniversary date, or find his beauty marks, or make love with him right after. This metropolis and all of it's people might have other things, like summer parties and study sessions and dinner outings, but no one else will have what Haruka has with Makoto. In this wild and chaotic place they call *Tokyo*, on the winding road they call *city life*, Haruka is certain of this one thing.

Not one of these 13,189,000 people knows the extent of *Haruka and Makoto*.

"Haru."

And as Haruka stares up at Makoto, feeling the sun on his face in the middle of an early summer downpour, he watches Makoto's face stretch into that usual smile, warm and at home. Haruka snaps out of all of his thoughts, offering the softest smile at the boy in front of him, shy and sincere. Wholeheartedly tender.

Makoto just sighs in all shakiness, the *pitter-patter* of the rain bouncing off their umbrella.

"Can you tell me something?"

"Hm?"

"Well...what's our anniversary again?" Makoto asks, looking away.

Haruka frowns at the question, because if there's something Makoto won't forget, it's their anniversary.

"August first." Haruka answers him.

"Two months away, huh?" Makoto laughs a little bit.

"Yes." he answers him, with hesitation.

Haruka's not sure where this is going.

"Ah...that's really too far away." Makoto shakes his head in a mumble and partakes in another deep exhale, closing his eyes for a moment. Makoto goes into his pocket, producing a closed palm in front of Haruka and slowly outstretching his fingers.

Resting in his palm is a ring, simple in design without engravings or embedded jewels, but carrying a whole universe's worth of meaning.

Makoto looks nervous out of his mind, and Haruka knows this because he recognizes the trembling of his lips and that soft, unsure frown in the same way he knows his innocent head tilts and usual smiles, but there's a resolve in the way he's standing here with Haruka like this.

"Well...where do I even begin?" Makoto laughs a bit.

"Anywhere." Haruka breathes out, feeling his whole body start to shut down at the sight of a *ring*.

"I just...don't want to wait anymore." Makoto finally says, with a smile he can no longer suppress for the sake of seriousness. "All I know is that...I'd like to be with you. For a very long time. And I know we're *young*, and I might be rushing into things, but—"

It only takes Haruka a matter of moments to wrap his arms around Makoto, knocking the umbrella out of his hands and leaving both of them in the rain in a long and sweet kiss. It is one of those rare moments where Haruka can't stop himself from smiling, and then smiling *again*, and *again*, and *again*, nodding his response over and over. *Yes*, of course. *Yes*. And he's not even sure if this will even change things at all, because he knows he'll be with Makoto anyway, regardless of rings, but he also knows, despite denying the usual conventions of *coupling*, despite this dreary day, grey all around and wet in a murky, uncomfortable way, that he's *happy* Makoto has chosen to ask. He's *happy*.

"I love you." Haruka says in all quietness, against the *pitter-patter* of rain, the distant car horns, and the inane street chatter. But Makoto hears him all the same, because, even in a city as big as Tokyo, he can *always* hear Haruka. There's just no getting around this.

With those words, heard with upmost clarity it seems, Makoto slips the ring onto Haruka's finger—a gesture for, '*let's be together, forever.*'

"I love you, too, Haru." he says, his voice cracked and small. Every new kiss of Makoto's feels like a lifetime worth of blessings.

Haruka and Makoto stay like this for a little while longer, huddled on the cobblestone with rain absolutely drenching the both of them, before they decide it's time to link hands again, pick up their umbrella made for two, and head back home.

So, in the continuing downpour, Haruka just shuffles a little closer to Makoto under the umbrella.

And in response, Makoto wraps an arm around him and sneaks a kiss under the vinyl.

"Let's go." Makoto urges, softly.

'Let's be together, forever.'

And of all the 13,189,000 people here in this endless city, it is safe to say, without a single doubt, that the two of them know how to be *together*.



Chapter End Notes

First of all, I'd like to say, in all honesty and sincerity, thank you so much for taking the time to read this fic. If you've made it this far, thank you, thank you, thank you. (Of if you've read any of it, really.) I've really enjoyed writing it and it's really taken on a life of it's own from the original 5 chapter run I originally had in mind, and I'm so glad it did. It pains me that this is the last chapter, and I really do hate endings, but I believe this story has run its course and I think it's time to write other things. (Like other one shots and a planned multi-chapter AU in the works) It's time to bid adieu to 2/13189000!

As for this particular chapter, I wanted it to span about a year's worth, which is why there are like 11 parts instead of the usual 3 to 4. None of them are particularly long though, unlike some of the previous chapters, and I tried to reference back to previous chapters with particular wording. The last part runs in parallel to the first actually, which is what I wanted to do since the beginning!! I'm getting teary over this, hahaha.

(And I hope you don't mind the extra little doodle at the end, which I actually spent way too much time on l o l but I wanted to add the "pink sky" photo somehow!!!! Hopefully it's not too much of an eyesore. (If it causes any formatting issues, let me know and I'll fix is A S A P!)

And as for music for this particular chapter, I built up an arsenal of my most used MakoHaru writing music...so, "Dearly Beloved" from Kingdom Hearts, "Latch (Acoustic)" by Sam Smith, "At Home" by Crystal Fighters, "Ribcage" by Lorde, "Clair de Lune" by Claude Debussy, and random pieces from Clear Blue Notes (which I listen to sparingly, because it brings maximum PAIN.) Also, thanks be to the biased muted CNN, a lifetime inspiration.

Anyway...I guess this is the last author's note for this particular work. A little bittersweet. Again, thank you so much for sticking for the ride!! (◡_◡🌸) I love you all.

(come join me at @asplendidmoon on twitter for more shenanigans!!!!)

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!